

bloodlines

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/32289487) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/32289487>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	Video Blogging RPF , Minecraft (Video Game) , Dream SMP
Relationships:	Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Wilbur Soot & Technoblade , Wilbur Soot & TommyInnit , Technoblade & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade & Phil Watson , TommyInnit & Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Toby Smith Tubbo & Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Toby Smith Tubbo & Wilbur Soot , Tommyinnit & Tubbo , No Romantic Relationship(s)
Characters:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , c!TommyInnit , C!Philza , c!Wilbur Soot , C!Technoblade , Sleepy Bois Inc. (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF) , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Alexis Quackity , Niki Nihachu , Jack Manifold
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Royalty , Found Family , crimeboys duo , clingy duo , Bedrock Bros , Hurt/Comfort , I'll try to give warnings before each chapter , chapter names are song titles , Bloodvines - Freeform , Angst , Pogtopia on Dream Team SMP (Video Blogging RPF) , Panic Attacks , Implied/Referenced Child Abuse , TommyInnit Needs a Hug (Video Blogging RPF) , Angst with a Happy Ending , Fluff
Language:	English
Collections:	Found family for the soul , Found family to make me feel something, em's to read list , still cool fics :) , Favorite fanfics that I already finished
Stats:	Published: 2021-06-30 Completed: 2021-09-25 Words: 71,995 Chapters: 19/19

bloodlines

by [youreyeslookliketheocean](#)

Summary

Tommy took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of summer and the soil beneath his feet. This was unlike anything he'd ever seen before. The land he'd come from, the SMP lands, had been beautiful, but never this beautiful. The sun had never sent gold rippling across tall, soft grass as it set. The air had never smelled quite as sweet or quite as fresh.

Maybe it was the fact that he could see the spires of Pogtopia's castle glimmering gold in the distance beyond the second hill. Maybe it was just because there were no bloodvines crawling here, tainting everything they touched with poison and insanity. But whatever the reason, as Tommy plunged forth into the field, he swore he could taste the beginnings of freedom on his tongue.

Tommy's an orphan on the run from his previous guardian. When Phil's kingdom of Pogtopia is threatened by the bloodvines—a strange, brainwashing plant infecting many of the surrounding kingdoms—he must work together with Phil and his two sons to keep the kingdom, and their family, safe.

A royal au sbi fic... + the bloodvines, for spice.

Notes

This chapter's title is the song ["Prologue" by Chase Petra](#) :))

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The soles of Tommy's worn, red shoes pounded against uneven ground as he ran through the forest. Tree roots and thick, dangling moss threatened to trip and blind him, but he stumbled through them anyway, panting and wheezing but never once stopping. There was no time to stop. If he stopped, it was over. If he stopped, he'd be found. If he stopped, he never should have started in the first place.

A leather bag jostled at his side, filled with the few belongings he had left. A half-empty water bottle, a compass, one of the red bandanas he usually tied around his neck, and a singular music disc. The disc had belonged to his mother, and although Tommy had never known her, or perhaps *because* he had never known her, he still liked to listen to it. Sometimes, if he closed his eyes while listening, he could almost picture her there with him. They'd be sitting on the grass, him in her lap, her picking dandelions and humming along to the steady tune. Sunshine would ripple through patches of wildflowers around them, and spread a warm, honey-colored glow across his mother's face.

He couldn't actually remember her face—she'd died not long after giving birth to him—but he could imagine the way she smiled. Bright and carefree and ever so slightly crooked.

It was like his, he hoped.

Tommy yelped as his foot caught on a tree root he hadn't seen. He tripped, staggering forwards and into the dirt. His left hand twisted beneath him as he hit the ground, and he bit back a scream as pain laced through his wrist. He rolled over, clutching the offended hand to himself as he stumbled back to his feet.

Keep going, keep going. Just a little farther, a voice in the back of his mind chanted.

So, ignoring the pulsing pain in his wrist, he continued to run.

At some point he reached the edge of the woods, and towering pine trees gave way to a sprawling valley. Tall, bright green summer grass rippled in the wind. Wildflowers—crimson poppies, pale blue cornflowers, lavender lupines, and blindingly yellow dandelions—spattered the field in clusters, like someone had dipped the edge of their paintbrush in the different shades and blotted a canvas with them. A river ran between the hill Tommy stood at the crest of and the hill opposite him, splitting the valley in two. Sunlight glimmered on the water's surface, giving it the illusion of being liquid gold.

Tommy took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of summer and the soil beneath his feet. This was unlike anything he'd ever seen before. The land he'd come from, the SMP lands, had been beautiful, but never *this* beautiful. The sun had never sent gold rippling across tall, soft grass as it set. The air had never smelled quite as sweet or quite as fresh.

Maybe it was the fact that he could see the spires of Pogtopia's castle glimmering gold in the distance beyond the second hill. Maybe it was just because there were no bloodvines crawling here, tainting everything they touched with poison and insanity. But whatever the reason, as Tommy plunged forth into the field, he swore he could taste the beginnings of freedom on his tongue.

Chapter End Notes

hi! this fic has been a long time in the making. it's actually already complete and in my google docs, but to maintain some sort of "posting schedule" i'll be posting about once a week.

//

follow me on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! i post my fic updates there.

i hope you enjoy the story! <3

Who Are You, Really?

Chapter Summary

Tommy stopped and looked up, meeting Phil's eyes again. "I ran away from it, but it's coming closer. And they are as well. The people. Everyone who's touched it. They want to spread it."

Phil frowned. "Does it have a name?"

//

Phil gets an unexpected visitor, receives a warning, and offers to let the messenger stay. Techno is pissed.

Chapter Notes

Title song is ["Who Are You, Really?"](#) by Mikky Ekko!

Also, just a note, the chapters/scenes in this fic are going to switch between all 4 of the sleepy bois' POVs. The first few chapters stick to one person's pov the whole time, but after I think chapter 4 (??) they're gonna switch more often between scenes. Just wanted to explain that really quick.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Pogtopia was a small kingdom. It bordered the SMP lands and Snowchester both, but most of the land closer to those two kingdoms was unused and rural. People could move out there if they wished, but, for the most part, everyone stuck close to the center of Pogtopia, where the castle and village presided. They'd built homes and shops, inns and diners, all fairly close together, forming a tightly knit community that Phil was incredibly proud of. Not to mention that its small population size and general sense of community meant that Phil, as Pogtopia's king, didn't have quite as much work as most kings did. It gave him more time to spend with his—

Phil glanced up from his papers as the door to his office creaked open. A head full of brown, curly hair appeared first, followed by golden brown eyes and then the rest of Phil's tall, eighteen-year-old son, Wilbur. The door shut behind him with a click, and Wilbur moved across the floor to his father's desk.

"What's up, mate?" Phil asked as Wilbur sank into a chair across from him.

Wilbur leaned forwards, resting an elbow against Phil's desk. "When are you going to be done with those papers? It's almost nine o'clock."

“That’s not too late.”

Wilbur sank further into his elbow, squishing his cheek against his palm. “It’s too late for dinner.”

Phil cursed, setting down his pen and giving Wilbur his full attention. How had he forgotten dinner? He, Wilbur, and Techno always ate it together. It was the one meal of the day they ate as a family, and he’d forgotten.

“Wil, I’m sorry. I just have to finish looking over these trade routes with Snowchester. The summer heat is coming, and the last thing I want is for our ice trades to be royally scuffed when it does.”

“Can I help?”

“Erm, you could, but it would require some explaining and that would take longer than it’ll take me to just do it myself. I’ll let you help next time, if you want.”

Wilbur sat back, pushing his round, silver colored glasses up the bridge of his nose. He looked older with them on. More like the future king he was training to become. “Okay.”

There was a moment of silence as Phil glanced back down at the trade outline. It was a mess, but he couldn’t quite blame Snowchester for it. Their ruler was quite young—younger than Wilbur, even. He’d had to step up after his father passed, and it was obvious the boy was struggling. Still, he’d done a better job than Phil would have at that age.

“Do you want anything from dinner?” Wilbur spoke up, interrupting Phil’s thoughts.

He glanced up, about to tell Wil not to worry about it and that he’d get something later, but the office door clicked open again before he had the chance. He and Wilbur both turned to look as one of the castle guards stepped inside.

“Sorry to bother you, your highnesses, but uh... there’s someone here who’s requesting an audience with you.” The guard glanced meaningfully at Phil as he spoke, making it clear who the visitor wanted to talk to.

He and Wilbur exchanged confused looks. Hardly anyone requested an audience with Phil anymore. The kingdom had been at peace for years, and their community was so small that problems within it were scarce occurrences. Plus, it was nine o’clock at night, a bit late to be requesting a meeting with the king.

“Who is it?” Phil asked, turning back to the guard.

“I don’t know. A boy. Young. I don’t think he’s from here.”

Wilbur shot Phil a curious glance, but Phil was already pushing back from his desk to stand. He brushed his green silk robes off, then clasped his hands in front of his chest.

“Alright, lead the way.”

The guard, Quackity, had been right in saying the boy was young. He was small and scrawny, with a faded white shirt and red vest hanging from his frame. The cargo pants he wore were ripped at the knees, and rich brown dirt streaked across the tan fabric. Even the child's face was dirty. It looked like he had rubbed his eyes with dirty palms, accidentally smearing his cheeks brown. His arms, too, were littered with smudges of dirt and bruises.

A leather bag was slung across his chest, dangling down at his side as he stood awkwardly in the middle of the throne room. He had one hand on its strap, clutching it like his life depended on it. The other hand hung loose at his side.

Phil shifted on his throne. He'd always hated this chair. It was made of marble, and raised up on a stage just *slightly* higher than the rest of the floor. It wouldn't have been so uncomfortable if there was some sort of cushion, or fabric, but there wasn't.

Wilbur and Techno both sat on their respective thrones beside him. Techno had heard the commotion and joined them as they walked down the hall to the throne room.

"What the hell is a kid doin' here?" Techno had asked as they walked along.

Phil had only shrugged. He didn't know.

Now both his sons sat, poised and silent, beside him as they regarded this newcomer.

"I was told you wanted to speak with me?" Phil warily began. His voice echoed in the gigantic throne room.

The boy nodded. He made to step forward, but Quackity pressed a hand to his shoulder and he froze.

"Uh, yeah. I—"

The boy shot a nervous glance over his shoulder at Quackity, and Phil quickly raised a hand, signaling the guard to step back. Hesitantly, Quackity obeyed.

"Um..." The boy shifted uncertainly between his feet. He looked almost like a caged animal, standing there. His eyes flickered around the throne room, taking in the three-story windows, the red carpet, and the stone pillars. More than once, they darted to the door.

"How about you start with your name, mate," Phil gently suggested.

The boy's eyes latched onto his. They were bright blue, almost startlingly so. His hair was also bright—a golden blond color that stood out in comparison with his dirtied clothes and face. It fell in fluffy curls across his forehead, while the back had been pulled into a short ponytail. He couldn't be any more than fifteen years old, Phil thought.

“Tommy,” the boy, Tommy, said. “I’m Tommy.”

“No last name?”

Tommy hesitated a moment before shaking his head. “Not one that I can remember.”

“You don’t have parents?”

“They’re dead.”

An orphan, then. Like Phil had been. Like Techno, before Phil had taken him in. What was another orphan doing on his doorstep?

“How old are you?” Phil decided to ask instead.

“Fourteen,” Tommy responded, shooting another glance back at Quackity.

The guard hadn’t moved an inch, but Phil supposed that Quackity could come across as rather intimidating when you didn’t personally know him. He had a long, jagged, white scar across half of his face. It crossed over his left eye, which he’d been blinded in, and continued down until it reached the upper corner of his lip. Phil had offered him a patch for the blind eye when he’d first joined the royal guard, but Quackity refused. Possibly for the very same reason that Tommy was warily eyeing him now: intimidation.

“And where are you from?”

“The—” Tommy paused. “Hold on, I requested an audience with *you*. Why are you asking *me* so many questions?”

Quackity raised his eyebrows, and Techno shifted beside Phil—as if ready to jump in and defend him. Phil, on the other hand, chuckled.

“I’m just curious. It’s not often we get visitors in Pogtopia. What brings you here, Tommy?”

Tommy shifted. “I came to warn you. There’s this... this *plant*.”

Techno snickered quietly beside him, and Phil reached out a hand to lightly swat his leg.

“A plant?”

Tommy nodded. His bright eyes had darkened, and his grip on the leather bag tightened. “I don’t know exactly where it came from—somewhere in the Badlands, from what I’ve heard—but it’s... it *does* something to people. It wiped the Badlands clean, and the village I lived near as well. Everyone who came into contact with it started acting... weird.”

Techno leaned closer to Phil, muttering under his breath, “I think this *kid’s* weird,” but Phil ignored it.

“Weird how? And wiped them clean? Did it kill them?” he asked.

Tommy shook his head. “No, it doesn’t kill them, exactly.” He glanced towards the darkened windows. Beyond them, Phil knew, lay Pogtopia’s tiny village. And beyond that was the river and the forest that separated Pogtopia from the SMP lands. “It manipulates them, though. Drives them to insanity. I—” Tommy cut himself off, inhaling, and looking down at his shoes. Quietly, almost to the point where Phil couldn’t hear, he said, “I saw a man kill his wife after it touched him. He was telling her to touch it too, that it would make her happy, and when she said no, he...”

Tommy stopped and looked up, meeting Phil’s eyes again. “I ran away from it, but it’s coming closer. And they are as well. The people. Everyone who’s touched it. They want to spread it.”

Phil frowned. “Does it have a name?”

“I... I’m not sure. I’ve been calling them bloodvines, but only because that’s what they look like. They’re all red and squiggly. Disgustin’ looking. Like veins.”

“Where is it now?”

Tommy frowned, looking to the windows again as if they held the answer. He looked incredibly small standing in the middle of the giant throne room, wearing tattered clothes and clutching a worn satchel. Phil had to wonder where he actually came from. Who had taken care of him? Or had he lived alone? He’d spoken of a village near him, and of the Badlands, but he’d never actually said where he lived.

“It’s on the border of the SMP lands, last I heard,” Tommy finally said. “They’re fighting it, but it’ll probably take them over in a few days at most. If the infected Badlanders don’t kill them first, that is.”

Phil glanced to his left, where Wilbur sat. He’d been uncharacteristically quiet the entire meeting, and was watching Tommy with an indiscernible look on his face. Phil, usually so good at reading his sons, wasn’t sure what to make of it.

Phil turned back to Tommy. “Well thank you, Tommy, for this information. I’ll have to speak with the royal guard about it, but for now it’s getting late and most of them will be asleep. Do you have a place to stay nearby?”

“A place? Oh, um, not yet. I hadn’t actually thought that far ahead...” Tommy rolled off, twiddling the strap of his bag.

“You could stay here.”

Phil nearly jumped as Wilbur spoke up beside him. He turned to him, surprised, but Wilbur wasn’t paying attention to him. His brown eyes were solely focused on the young boy standing in the middle of the room.

Tommy chuckled nervously. “Um... really?”

Wilbur nodded, leaning forward in his seat. “We have a guest room. Several, actually. They hardly get any use, so I’m sure my dad wouldn’t mind... uh, would you?”

Wilbur turned towards Phil, addressing him for the first time since Tommy had entered the room. His eyes were not pleading, necessarily, but that same indiscernible look from before was in them, and Phil didn’t want to say no. He doubted he would have turned away the kid anyway, but Wilbur’s expression was the tipping point on his scale.

Phil let his eyes flicker over Tommy once more—the dirt, the grime, the wide blue eyes... he was just a kid—then sighed and nodded. “I’m not letting a child wander about alone at night, even in Pogtopia. Tommy can stay here for the night.”

Wilbur sat back, as if satisfied, while Tommy’s eyes widened and Techno turned to look at Phil incredulously. Phil could tangibly *feel* the judgement radiating off of his adopted son. If Tommy hadn’t been standing right there in front of them, Techno probably would have said something along the lines of “*Heh?*” or, in a jokingly formal tone, “*Phil, is this really the best course of action you could have taken?*”. But there Tommy was, so all Phil got from Techno was a surprised and mildly annoyed glare.

“A-Are you sure?” Tommy asked.

Phil nodded, crossing his hands over each other in his lap. He ran his thumb across his wedding ring—a habit he’d developed after his wife passed away two years prior. She wouldn’t have let a child go wandering about in the middle of the night, so Phil wouldn’t either.

“Yes, I’m sure. Quackity will help you find a room.”

“Thank you,” Tommy stammered out, “I’m not sure how to repay you.”

“You already have by bringing us this warning. Don’t worry about it,” Phil said. He gestured to Quackity, who stepped forwards and smiled at the boy encouragingly.

“Come on,” the guard said, “let’s go find a room for you.” Notably, he didn’t attempt to place his hand on Tommy’s shoulder again. Instead, he gestured for Tommy to follow him as he turned and headed back towards the exit doors.

The boy shot one more nervous, curious glance back towards Phil and his sons, then turned and hurried after Quackity.

The moment Tommy’s blond hair disappeared through the doorway, Techno was on him.

“Why’d you do that, Phil? Can’t you see he’s obviously crazy? I mean, *bloodvines*? A plant that makes people go insane? It’s a *plant!*”

Techno’s long, pink braid swished behind him as he shook his head. His skin naturally had a pink tint to it, but now his cheeks were flushed almost as red as the carpet in front of them.

Wilbur butt in, pushing up from his throne to stand between the two of them. “He’s just a kid, Technoblade. What’s he going to do?”

"I don't know, burn the palace down from the inside? Steal top secret documents? We don't even know where he's from."

"But we have good relations with every other kingdom right now. Who would want to hurt us?"

"I don't know, Wil, anyone? You never know what people are planning. Don't be so naïve—"

"Oh *fuck off*. You're just paranoid."

"*I am not!*"

"Phiiiiilll—"

"Phil, tell Wil he's being ridiculous—"

"Shut it!" Phil huffed, shooting twin glares at both Wilbur and Techno. "I don't want to hear it. I decided on this, and that's final. Besides, it's only one night, and I'll see to it that Quackity is outside his door the entire time."

Techno huffed, stubbornly crossing his arms over his chest and looking away. But Wilbur grinned, reaching out to grab his father's arm.

"What do you think he was talking about with those bloodvines? Do you think they'll come here?" he asked.

Phil shrugged. "Maybe."

Wilbur's eyes lit up, and Phil was reminded once again of the differences between his biological son and Technoblade. Where Techno was all caution and calculation, Wilbur was curious, always wanting to dive into new projects full force. While Techno patiently calculated all the potential outcomes and aimed for the singular one he wanted, Wilbur was more excited about experimentation. He enjoyed seeing how things could go wrong almost as much as he enjoyed seeing things go right. It might have been concerning to Phil, since Wilbur—as his biological son—was technically first in line to the throne even though Technoblade was a year older, but Wil was like a sponge. He soaked up every bit of knowledge available to him. Phil knew his curiosity was only a by-product of that desire to learn. And the ability to learn, and learn quickly, was a good quality in a ruler.

Phil stood up, straightening his robes as he headed towards the throne room doors. "Go get some sleep, boys. We'll talk about this more tomorrow with the guards."

Techno grunted something unintelligible, but Phil heard both of them stand and follow him from the room.

Phil wished them goodnight when they turned down their separate hallways, and then he was back in his office again, bent over the same papers but unable to focus on them as his thoughts swirled in the back of his head.

He hadn't told either of them the real reason he believed what Tommy said.

Wrapping his fingers around the bottom of his desk's top drawer, Phil pulled it out, revealing a messy pile of papers that barely fit inside the tiny space. He pulled one out, unrolling and smoothing it down over the desktop. It was a drawing he'd made, a sketch. Phil wasn't the best artist, not by a long shot, but he'd drawn this after waking up from the same dream for the seventh consecutive time some nights ago.

Every day for a week, he'd had this dream. The drawing didn't encompass all of it, but it was a brief snapshot of it that Phil couldn't get out of his head.

Phil smoothed the corners down and rested his elbows on the desk, staring down at the image he'd recreated from memory.

Vines, twisting and curled, burst forth and sprawled across the valley like tree roots. They slunk through the tall grasses and wrapped around the pine trees closest to the edge of the clearing. Behind them, the rest of the forest was burning, and in the shadows of the fires, there were people. Hundreds of them. In the image, as in Phil's dream, they were merely silhouettes that could be passed off as odd shaped shadows, but now Phil knew what they must be: an army. The possessed Badlanders, and potentially infected warriors from the SMP lands as well.

Phil let the paper naturally roll itself up again as he placed his head in his hands.

He'd speak with the guard tomorrow, and they'd figure out a solution. They had to. They'd get their best fighters prepared. They'd start an army. They'd do everything possible to prevent these vines from taking over, because if they didn't...

Phil closed his eyes. The ending scene of his dream, the one he'd seen just before startling awake every night, flashed through his memory. Dead bodies everywhere. Golden spires crumbling. Red, thorned vines covering the ground and climbing up the castle walls.

It was of Pogtopia, and it was burning.

Chapter End Notes

looking at my own writing months after writing it is pain, lol. updating early though because 1. i am impatient, 2. i'm leaving on vacation soon and won't have access to a computer, and 3. the prologue is criminally short and i regretted not giving you guys much plot.

//

follow me on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!!

Boys Will Be Bugs

Chapter Summary

Wilbur chuckled, lightly nudging Tommy back from the edge. “It’s like you’ve never seen nature before.”

“I haven’t,” Tommy said, then immediately added, “not like this, at least.”

//

Bacon, bruises, bugs, and a hearty dose of crimeboys fluff.

Chapter Notes

Title song is ["Boys Will Be Bugs"](#) by Cavetown.

CW: mentions of abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur loved mysteries.

When he was ten, he’d stolen Phil’s crown just so he could force Technoblade to hide it from him and let him play detective to find it. When Techno got into writing, he’d write riddles and word puzzles for Wilbur to solve, sending him on scavenger hunts all around the castle. During the summer they’d sit out in the gardens at night, talking about myths and legends that could never fully be explained. In the fall, the castle library was stacked full of detective novels and true crime reports.

It was fun. It was alluring. The prospect of the unknown was daunting, and Wilbur wanted to learn everything he could about how to find it out. How to make it known.

So when Tommy showed up, Wilbur had immediately been drawn to him.

Tommy was a mystery. Sure, Wilbur knew the basics. Tommy was fourteen. His parents were dead. He had blond hair and electric blue eyes. He came to warn them about some plant he called ‘bloodvines,’ and looked about as beat up as Wilbur’s shield after a sparring match with Techno. But there were still a lot of things about Tommy that Wilbur didn’t know.

Where was he from? How had his parents died? Didn’t he have a guardian of some sort looking after him? Why had he come here alone?

And then there was the biggest question, the one that kept nagging at the back of Wilbur’s brain: why did he *recognize* Tommy?

Something about his face, his eyes, was distantly familiar. He'd first noticed it in the throne room, when Tommy had looked up at Phil and Wilbur had really gotten a good look at him. Now, it was almost all he could think about. Who was he? Why did Wilbur feel like he'd seen him before? It was on the tip of his tongue, begging to be remembered, but no matter how hard he tried he just couldn't place it.

"I don't mean to criticize you, Wilbur, but if you glare at those eggs any harder they might jus' self-combust."

Wilbur blinked, tearing his eyes off of his forkful of scrambled eggs just in time to see Technoblade raise an eyebrow. They were sitting across from each other at the dining room table—matching plates of scrambled eggs, bacon, and pancakes half-empty in front of them. Well, Techno's was half-empty. Wilbur had barely touched his.

"Do you think Tommy's up, yet?" Wilbur asked.

Techno picked up a piece of bacon, raising it to his lips. "Is that why you're all distracted this mornin'? Why's it matter to you?"

Wilbur shrugged. "I don't know. It's just... I recognize him from somewhere, but I can't place it. Do you?"

"Do I what? Recognize him?" Technoblade took a whiff of the bacon in his hand, made a face, and flicked it across the table to Wil. It landed right in the middle of Wilbur's syrup-covered pancakes, sinking into the maple liquid slowly while Techno continued to talk. "No. I don't know who he is. Some kid. Personally, I don't get why you and Phil let him stay here. Where *is* Phil, by the way?"

"His office," Wilbur sighed, resting his elbows on the table and looking down at his plate. The half-eaten pile of eggs, soggy pancakes, and Techno's drowned piece of bacon looked less than appetizing. But maybe it was just because he wasn't all that hungry. "He's been in there all night, I think."

Techno didn't reply, but he didn't need to. Wilbur knew they were both thinking the same thing.

Phil said he loved Pogtopia because it was so small he never had too many problems to deal with at once, and could afford to spend more time with his sons. Recently, though, he'd been working almost non-stop. And after the meeting with Tommy last night...

Wilbur would never admit to spying, but he'd walked past his father's office enough times last night to know that Phil had never left for his bedroom.

Their father was working himself into the ground, but neither of them knew why.

"Something is up with him," Wilbur finally said, shaking his head and pushing back from the table. Maybe the food didn't look appetizing to him, but surely Phil would be hungry when he woke up. The least Wil could do for him was bring him some breakfast.

He picked up his plate and headed towards the kitchen door. “I’ll be back.”

The hallways in the castle were long and spacious. Maroon colored carpet lined the floor, and tall windows like the ones in the throne room stretched from the ceiling—about two stories above Wilbur’s head—down to the ground below. Large, red curtains were tied back at the edges of each window, and crystal chandeliers dangled down from above.

Wilbur turned left at the end of the hall and entered the foyer, where he took the stairs two at a time up to the second floor. From there, he turned left, pushing open a pair of wooden doors and entering another hallway. This was the guest bedroom hall, but Phil’s office was at the very end of it. Because they rarely had guests, Phil swore it was the quietest place in the castle.

Wilbur’s bedroom was farther up another hallway, the first door to the left, and Techno’s was just a few doors down on the opposite side. Phil’s room was, ironically, on the opposite side of the castle. His bedroom was the largest, built for both him and Kristin with a domed ceiling and a king sized bed.

All of the rooms in this hallway—besides Phil’s office—were guest bedrooms.

One of them was Tommy’s.

Wilbur glanced around the hall, looking for Quackity, but the guard was nowhere to be seen. Wasn’t he supposed to be guarding Tommy’s room? Where had he gone? Had Tommy... had Tommy left?

The thought sent Wilbur’s heart sinking for approximately half a second before he heard the sound of laughter coming from a door to his right. Wilbur walked over to it, leaning forwards to better hear.

“Pfft— no way you did that.”

“Yes I did! The look on the other guy’s face was *priceless* . Not sure if I’m ever allowed back in Hypixel Kingdom, though.”

Another peal of laughter, bright and bubbly, came from behind the door. Wilbur found himself smiling along, although he had no clue what Tommy and Quackity were talking about.

Quackity laughed, and Wilbur heard a chair shift inside the room.

“Anyway, that’s how I got this scar.”

“What about the one across your eye?”

“Oh, that was from a pickaxe accident years ago.”

“Really? What happened?”

“Well—”

Wilbur leaned closer, trying to press his ear to the door, but as he did the fork slid from the plate he was still holding. It clattered loudly against the door as it fell to the floor below. Wilbur jumped, pulling back from the door just as a chair screeched inside the room. The door flung open, and Wilbur came face to face with a scowling Quackity.

Upon recognizing Wilbur, Quackity's expression immediately softened. He stepped back, opening the door further. "Oh, Wilbur, did you knock? Sorry I didn't answer sooner, I was—"

"Talking to *me*."

Wilbur's gaze shifted to Tommy as the blond haired, blue eyed kid popped out from behind Quackity's shoulder. He looked much better—much *cleaner*—than last night. All the dirt had been washed from his face, and although he hadn't actually changed clothes, they didn't look quite as disgusting as they had before. Maybe Quackity had washed them while Tommy was sleeping.

"Uh, hi. Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt. I was just bringing—"

"Ooh!"

Tommy elbowed his way past Quackity, eyes wide and solely focused on the plate in Wilbur's hand. "Are those pancakes?"

"Um, yeah, they are. Are you hungry?"

Tommy glanced up, meeting Wilbur's eyes for half a second before looking down again. "Uh... a little," he admitted.

Wilbur glanced down at the plate in his hands. He'd been meaning to bring it to Phil, but if Tommy was *right here* and hungry ...

Wil held the plate out. "They're a bit soggy. And probably cold."

"That doesn't matter. I've had worse," Tommy said, taking the plate from Wilbur's outstretched hands.

He pulled the plate in to himself, staring down at the pile of food hungrily. Only then did Wilbur remember he'd dropped the fork.

"Oh. I dropped the fork," he explained awkwardly, "I can go get another one, though. Just give me a minute and I'll be—"

Before he could finish, Tommy had already swooped down to the floor and grabbed the fork.

"Five second rule," he said, grinning wildly as he straightened back up.

Wilbur didn't have the heart to tell him it had definitely been longer than five seconds.

Tommy stabbed the piece of bacon Techno had flung, raised it to his mouth, and shoved it in proudly. Syrup dribbled down his chin.

Wilbur chuckled. "Okay, that is disgusting, little gremlin child."

Tommy narrowed his eyes at Wilbur. "I am *not* a child."

"Mhm. You're fourteen, by law you are a child. I would know."

"Right, because your dad makes the laws here, doesn't he." Tommy chewed thoughtfully on his piece of bacon. "You should ask him to change that one."

Wilbur tilted his head. "Oh yeah? What age would you have adults be, then?"

"Fourteen, obviously. How old are you anyways?"

"Eighteen," Wilbur answered, "*legally* an adult."

"Fuck," Tommy muttered under his breath, spearing a cluster of scrambled eggs. Wilbur laughed.

Quackity slid out from behind Tommy and stepped into the hall. He held one of the guard comms in his hand, and was staring down at it with furrowed eyebrows. "I should get going. Phil just sent a message through the comms for all the guards to meet in the throne room. I don't think Tommy's any trouble, though, so he should be fine on his own for a while. Right?"

Quackity looked up, making pointed eye contact with Tommy who gave him a mock salute. The fork just barely missed tangling in his bangs.

"Aye aye, Big Q," he said.

Wilbur turned questioning eyes to Quackity at the nickname, but the guard just shrugged.

"Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on him," Wilbur said. "I've been meaning to talk to him, anyway."

Quackity nodded. "Alright. I'll see you two later, then."

Wilbur waved as Quackity headed off down the hall, then turned to Tommy. He'd stopped eating at some point between the salute and Quackity actually leaving, and was staring at Wilbur with some indiscernible look in his eyes.

"What do you want to talk to me about?" he asked. His grip tightened around the plate's rim and, suddenly, Wilbur had a name for his expression. Fear. Tommy was scared.

He hadn't meant to make him nervous. Hurriedly, Wilbur racked his brain for a way to assure Tommy he didn't mean any harm. His eyes caught on the window at the other end of Tommy's guest bedroom. It overlooked the castle gardens, the same place Wilbur and Techno had told late night stories all those years ago.

"Do you want to go see the gardens?" Wilbur asked. "They're really pretty this time of year. You can eat first, and then I can give you a tour."

Tommy glanced down at his plate, then back up at Wilbur. For a moment that seemed to last forever, Wilbur thought he was going to step back into the room and slam the door in his face. But then Tommy nodded his head, golden blond curls bobbing up and down as he did.

“Sure,” he said. “Are they the ones outside my window? The roses looked nice. All red and shit, you know?”

Wilbur nodded, completely serious. “Oh yes. Very red, and shit.”

Tommy looked up, eyes wide as if he expected Wilbur to be mad, but Wilbur was grinning, and after a second Tommy joined him.

“Why don’t you finish up eating, and I’ll show you around.”

—»-»-»—

The garden had always been Wilbur’s favorite part of the castle. Most importantly because it was where he and his mother had played music together when he was four. Second most importantly because it was the best place to find bugs, and Wilbur loved bugs.

Tommy was a bit like a bug. Wide eyed, easily fascinated, persistent, slightly annoying...

“Look at that one, oh my prime. Why is it so *green* ?” Tommy asked, pointing towards the center of the water fountain.

They were both sitting on the fountain’s stone rim, overlooking its rather massive basin. It was almost more of a pond than a fountain base. Lily pads sprung up out of the forest green water, their gigantic, pale pink flowers attracting the dragonflies that zipped above their heads. In the center, three tiers stacked on top of each other allowed water to cascade down into the basin, sending ripples across the whole pond.

Wilbur sighed. “Because it’s a frog, Tommy. Have you never seen a frog before?”

Tommy frowned, pushing his bangs back from his face so he could see better. His hair was rather long, Wilbur realized. He wasn’t wearing it in a ponytail today, and the tips of his golden blond curls brushed against his shoulders.

“Of course I’ve seen a frog before,” Tommy said adamantly. “But that one’s, like, neon green!”

He leaned further over the edge of the pond, trying to get a closer look at the lily pads in the center, where a bright green frog sat croaking. One of its beady eyes was trained on Tommy, obviously suspicious of his staring.

Wilbur didn’t blame him. He’d be nervous too if someone watched him like that.

Wilbur chuckled, lightly nudging Tommy back from the edge. “It’s like you’ve never seen nature before.”

“I haven’t,” Tommy said, then immediately added, “not like this, at least.”

“Really? The palace gardens are nice, of course, but most of Pogtopia has flowers like these. They’re everywhere.”

Tommy shook his head, picking up a pebble from the path and tossing it towards the fountain’s three tiers. It plopped into the second one, sending an extra burst of water over the side and into the basin.

“There were flowers where I lived, but never this many. I guess the weather’s just not right for them.”

Wilbur hummed. “Where do you live, anyway? Where’d you come from?”

“Ahh... it’s not really important. Far from here. In a... a village. I lived there for as long as I can remember, but it was boring as shit.”

Tommy shrugged as if it was no big deal, but Wilbur was good at reading people. He could see how Tommy’s shoulders tensed up. How his bright eyes flickered down to the ground, avoiding eye contact under the pretense of hunting for another pebble. For some reason, Tommy didn’t want to talk about where he lived.

That was fine. Wilbur didn’t necessarily *need* to know. But now he was curious as to why Tommy was dodging the question. His answers were so vague, he could literally be describing *anywhere*. Every land had villages. And with the massive fields and forests surrounding Pogtopia, every land was pretty far away, too.

But Tommy was shifting uncomfortably on the edge of the fountain, so Wilbur decided to drop the topic for now.

“Do you have a favorite bug?” he asked instead.

Tommy turned to look up at him incredulously. He’d found a satisfactory pebble, and dusted it off against his shirt as he spoke. “A favorite *bug*?”

Wilbur nodded. “Mine’s a woodlouse.”

Tommy stared at him for a moment, blue eyes wide and confused. Then, he laughed. “That’s the stupidest bug. Spiders are way cooler.”

Wilbur wrinkled his nose just as Tommy hurled his pebble into the pond. It landed with a *kerplunk* near the center, scaring the frog off his lily pad.

“Your favorite bug is a spider?” Wilbur said. “That’s disgusting.”

“No! Spiders are cool! They make webs and eat mosquitos,” Tommy defended.

Wilbur made a face and leaned back on his hands. The water fountain's stone rim was warm under his palms. If it was any later in the morning it probably would have been too hot to sit on, but since the sky was still faintly pink on the horizon, the stone hadn't had enough sun to really heat up yet.

"Well, if I ever find a spider in my bedroom, I know who I'll be calling to come kill it."

"Kill it? No, no, no. What you do is get a glass and a napkin and catch it. Then you can let it back outside." Tommy gestured with his hands as if he was really holding a cup and napkin, pressing them together and then releasing in demonstration.

Wilbur shuddered. "Disgusting. I will never, *ever* catch a spider. They deserve death."

Tommy laughed and chucked another pebble into the fountain. "You know, you'd think a prince would be braver. You come get me, then, and I'll catch it for you..." Tommy trailed off. His hand, which had previously been raised to throw another pebble, dropped back down to his side. "I, uh, I'm not sure how you'll get me when I'm not here, though."

There was a moment of silence filled only by the birds chirping and dragonflies buzzing. Finally, Wilbur spoke.

"Can I ask you a few more questions, Tommy?"

Tommy fidgeted. He'd collected a decently sized pile of pebbles on the stone between them while they'd been talking, and he picked one off the top to fiddle with. "Um, sure, I guess."

"You said 'lived,' before, when we were talking about flowers. Do you not live in that village still?"

"Well... no. Right now I live here, and by tomorrow I'll... I dunno. Find an inn or somewhere else to stay."

"Ah. You have an interesting sense of living. I think that, no matter where I go, I'll always live in this castle. It's my home."

Tommy hummed in acknowledgement, but otherwise said nothing. Wilbur took that as a sign to continue.

"Do you have any family here?"

Tommy shook his head. "No. My parents didn't have siblings, and my grandparents are all dead."

Wilbur nodded, picking up one of Tommy's rocks.

He was surprised by the way Tommy seemed to just accept death. He spoke the word in such a casual tone, as if it was typical conversation. Maybe, for him, it was.

Wilbur supposed he could relate a little bit. His mother had also passed away, but that had only been a couple years ago. The wound was still fresh, and it still hurt to talk about her

sometimes.

“I’m sorry,” Wilbur said, chucking his stone out into the pond. It bounced off a lily pad before sinking into the water.

“Don’t be.” Tommy threw another pebble. “I never knew any of them. Not really. My dad died before I was born, and my mom when I was two. I don’t even remember what they looked like.”

Somehow Wilbur thought that was almost worse. He didn’t voice that belief, though. Instead, he reached out and pointed vaguely to the bruises on Tommy’s arms. They’d been bothering him since yesterday night, when he’d first noticed them in the throne room. Most of them were so light, nearly faded, that they could have passed for dirt stains. But now that Tommy had taken a bath, it was painfully obvious that they were not dirt.

“What are these from?”

Tommy paused. “I... tripped running here.”

“And got separate bruises all up your arms?”

Tommy looked up at him, eyes suddenly narrowed, and drew his arms into his lap. “It’s really none of your business how clumsy I am, now is it?”

“No, I suppose not,” Wilbur said. And it really wasn’t. Whatever happened to Tommy was none of his business; he’d known the kid for less than a day. But if he was ever going to ask, he was going to do it now. “It’s just that... Techno had them too, when he first showed up here. I don’t think Phil quite remembers—he’s never been very good at reading people, might not even have noticed—but Techno told me how he got them, and it wasn’t from falling.”

Wilbur looked out over the garden surrounding them. Red rose bushes lined the path to his right. On the opposite side of the fountain, yellow marigolds and snapdragons sprung from plotted ground. To their left, lavender plants swayed lazily in the breeze, while the blue morning glories behind them had just started to open up for the day.

He remembered the day Techno had told him about his bruises. They’d been laying in the grass not too far from here. Close enough that Wilbur could smell the lavender. He couldn’t remember what had started the conversation, but somehow it had drifted to talking about scars. Wilbur had one, on his knee, from when he was seven and had accidentally cut it on the edge of a rock. Techno had several, and he’d been explaining how he got them when Wilbur remembered the bruises Techno used to have and had asked about them.

“Mmm... People in my village weren’t always the nicest to me,” Techno had explained. “I looked different, with all these scars and pinkish skin and hair, and I guess they didn’t like that.”

“Oh,” Wilbur had said, “that’s mean.”

Techno had nodded, and that had been that.

Now he got a distinct sense of déjà vu looking at Tommy, his arms littered with pale brown spots just like Techno's had been.

Tommy didn't look at him. He sat, still and silent, staring out across the pond. The pile of pebbles lay abandoned beside him.

After what felt like an eternity, he spoke. "Techno is your brother, right?"

Wilbur hummed an affirmative.

Tommy continued, "I don't have brothers. Or sisters. I was in the village orphanage by myself for a while, but when I was about six or seven, this guy pulled me out. He gave me a home. A family. We were like family. But..." Tommy trailed off, glancing down at his hands. They were scarred and callused—from what, Wilbur had no clue. Tommy fisted them in his lap. "I don't know. You can't tell anyone this, but he hurt me, sometimes. And I could never tell if it was on purpose or not, but it must have been on accident, because he always apologized later. But that's where these came from. *Some* of them." Tommy looked up, laughing nervously. "I actually *did* trip a few times coming here," he admitted.

Wilbur frowned. "But you got away from that guy, yeah? You don't live with him anymore?"

The sun must have risen higher behind Wilbur, if only by an inch, because it made Tommy's eyes practically glow as the two looked at each other.

"Yeah," Tommy said, nodding his head. "Yeah. I don't live with him anymore."

Wilbur sighed, his shoulders sinking back down. He hadn't realized he'd tensed them. He hadn't realized he cared so much, either. But he did. For some reason, he cared about this kid. Maybe it was because his face was still painfully familiar to him. Maybe it was because Tommy looked up at him like Wilbur was someone important outside of being the crown prince. Maybe it was because he reminded him strangely of himself and Techno both, mixed together. Maybe it really was just because he liked a mystery, or maybe it was just common human decency to care. Whatever the reason, Wilbur was glad Tommy wasn't in that situation anymore.

He reached out to pick up a new pebble, and Tommy did the same.

"Last question," Wilbur said, shooting Tommy a quick glance before looking out at the pond and taking aim. "Do you have somewhere to stay in Pogtopia?"

"I told you before. I'll find an inn."

"They won't let a fourteen-year-old stay alone."

"I won't tell them I'm fourteen, then."

"You have money?"

Silence. Wilbur let go of his pebble first, and it plopped into the fountain's second tier. Tommy's followed.

“...No.”

“You can stay here.”

Wilbur reached down for another pebble, pretending not to see Tommy’s mouth pop open in surprise.

“N-no, I can’t just— You— This is... this is the *castle* . I just came here to warn you about the vines, not to... not...” Tommy shook his head, curls flying. “No. No, I can’t.”

“You can, and you will,” Wilbur replied, tossing his pebble into the water. It was the last one from the pile. He stood up, brushing his pants off before turning and extending a hand to Tommy.

“But... but what about your dad?” Tommy asked, not taking Wilbur’s hand just yet.

Wilbur shrugged. “He won’t mind. Actually, he’ll probably appreciate having you here, since you’re the only one out of all of us who’s actually seen those vines you talked about. Besides —” Wil grinned. “—who else is gonna catch the spiders?”

Tommy’s gaze shifted down to Wilbur’s extended hand. Ever so slowly, he took it.

“Okay,” Tommy said. “Okay. But only until the vines are taken care of.”

“That’s all I ask.”

Wilbur walked back along the garden pathway, pulling Tommy along with him since his hand was still in his.

They walked in relative silence, occasionally trading jokes and banter until the heat became too much to bear and Wilbur turned them back towards the castle. Ironically, it was only once they’d made it through the front gates that Tommy seemed to realize their hands were still conjoined. He yanked his back as they crossed under the castle archway and into the entryway’s shade.

“Clingy bitch,” Tommy muttered under his breath, and Wilbur laughed.

Miles away, red vines began to weave their way through thick grasses.

Chapter End Notes

this was/is one of my favorite chapters, so i hope you enjoyed!

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Voices

Chapter Summary

“King Philza, it is with utmost urgency that we inform you of a new strand of disease overtakin’ the SMP lands. The disease seems to be transmitted from contact with a strange species of plant, red vines, that have spread from the Badlands. Symptoms of disease are—” Techno stopped reading, looking up at Phil. “It’s a plant, Phil. Like poison ivy. Can’t we just avoid it?”

“Not when it’s building an army.”

//

Emerald Duo, dandelions, and discussions of dreams.

It is not as pretty as it sounds.

Chapter Notes

Song from the chapter title is ["Voices"](#) by Derivakat

CW: mentions of blood, and kinda sorta death?? (really just the word is mentioned, though).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Technoblade did not particularly like change. Stability, repetition, predictability—these were the things he valued. These were the things he practiced daily in the training fields behind the castle, sword flashing, teeth gritted, muscles straining.

Techno enjoyed combat fighting. And he was good at it. Ridiculously good at it. And everyone in the castle, including the guards, knew it. It was why he was allowed here, now, with Phil in the throne room as he and his guards discussed what to do about the impending “bloodvines.”

Techno leaned back in his chair, trying to relieve some of the pain in his back from sitting straight for so long. He was nineteen; he shouldn’t have back pain. But after being raised in Nether, a hot, labor and violence oriented country many *many* miles away from Pogtopia, he supposed it was only natural. He’d had to work in the potato fields from dawn to dusk, and haul water every morning and evening alongside most of the other kids in his village. He’d lugged heavy buckets up and down the Nether’s dry and dusty hills, using a pole held behind his shoulders to support multiple buckets at the same time. It’s why his hands were so callused and worn, perfect for wielding swords and spears.

“That’s child labor, mate,” Phil had told him at some point after he’d arrived in Pogtopia and been taken in by him.

Techno had shrugged. *“It was survival for me,”* he’d said. And it was true. If he hadn’t done his part, his entire village would’ve gone hungry and thirsty.

Plus, it had taught him things. How to lift heavy weights. How to wield a spear and how to spar, since he’d occasionally sparred the other kids with their empty poles. It’d been a game of theirs.

It taught him how to push through physical pain. And when he grew older and taller than the other kids, and looked different with his pink toned skin and hair, and had scars and bruises from the way they treated him, it taught him how to shut off mental pain. The kids taunted and teased him, called him names, but Techno ignored them all. It was like a switch, and Technoblade had gotten very good at flipping it.

Now he wished he had a switch to tune out stupidity.

“We should probably set up some sort of patrol for the borders,” Phil was saying.

A large map of Pogtopia and its surrounding countries was spread across the table they’d set up in the middle of the throne room. Pogtopia was in the center of the map, separated from the other countries by a border of forests and rivers. Up in the Northeast, across a strip of ocean and buried in a land of snow and ice, was Snowchester. In the complete opposite direction, southwest, were the SMP lands. Those lands were by far the biggest section of territory on the map. Just past them were the Badlands, which Phil had marked with a red X. Apparently that was where the bloodvines were coming from. Then, on the very edge of the map past the Badlands, there was the Nether.

Techno averted his eyes from the thin stretch of pale desert, redirecting his attention to the top of the map.

Snowchester and Pogtopia were divided by a long stretch of empty land, and then again by a body of water that cut in from the ocean and pooled in what was considered the swamp lands. Last he’d heard, some person by the name of Foolish was trying to claim some of that empty land for himself. He’d already started building, apparently, but Techno wasn’t quite sure where.

Wilbur would probably know more. As the crown prince, Phil had trained him in diplomacies and in writing treatises, in history and politics in the present, in geography and law. He kept Wil as up to date as he could on all the different lands’ news.

Techno was usually present at those lessons too. But he didn’t always pay attention. The only reason he remembered Foolish was because he’d thought the man’s name was incredibly stupid.

What kind of politician called himself *Foolish* ?

“If we keep a stock of flaming arrows up there, that’d work.”

Techno tuned back in to the conversation with a slow blink. Quackity, one of the castle's most experienced guards, was the one who'd spoken. He sat directly across from Techno, but was looking at Phil on Techno's left.

"True. That would work," Phil hummed. "I think we have some extra arrows down in the vault that you could use, and we should only need a couple sets."

Quackity nodded. "Want me to get them set up now?"

"Sure. The sooner we're prepared, the better."

"Got it."

Quackity waited for the meeting to be officially ended by Phil before standing up and leaving, a trail of other guards trickling out behind him. Then it was just Techno and Phil left alone in the gigantic room.

Phil bent over the table, rolling up the map and clearing away all his feathered pens and charcoal pencils. An inkwell filled with bright red ink was amongst them, reminding Techno vaguely of scarlet colored blood spattered on dry, dusty ground— *it had been his; someone had punched him* —before he blinked, and the image disappeared.

"I don't get it," Techno said, pushing his chair back and standing up. "Why are you taking the word of some fourteen-year-old kid?"

"I'm not," Phil replied. He'd stuffed all the pens and ink into a small, woven bag, which he handed to Techno. "I'm also taking the word of the SMP lands. A messenger brought me this, this morning."

Before Techno could even fully sling the bag over his shoulder, a paper was thrust in his face. He took it, staring down at the looping handwriting.

"King Philza, it is with utmost urgency that we inform you of a new strand of disease overtakin' the SMP lands. The disease seems to be transmitted from contact with a strange species of plant, red vines, that have spread from the Badlands. Symptoms of disease are—" Techno stopped reading, looking up at Phil. "It's a *plant*, Phil. Like poison ivy. Can't we just avoid it?"

"Not when it's building an army," Phil said, wrapping an arm around the rolled up map and heading towards the doors. Techno dutifully followed behind him.

"How do we know it's makin' an army?" He looked back down at the letter, quickly skimming the rest. There was no mention of an army anywhere on the page. The closest thing to it was a single symptom described as 'becoming allegiant to the Crimson'.

Who in their right mind's gonna become allegiant to a color? Technoblade thought about asking, but Phil was already speaking again.

"That's what Tommy told us, last night," he said. "He said all the infected people are coming with these vines."

“And now we’re back to the whole ‘why are you listening to a fourteen-year-old’ question.”

Phil sighed, letting the throne room’s heavy doors swing shut behind them.

It was almost afternoon, now—they’d been in that meeting for hours. Sunlight drifted in through the windows as they stepped into the open hallway above the entryway stairs and headed across.

“I have something I need to tell you,” Phil said, “but I have to tell you in private. I don’t want anyone else to hear. Let’s go to my office, and—”

“Wilbur! Give it back, you twat!”

“No! Maybe if you grew taller, you could reach it yourself.”

“Oh my fuckin’ *prime* . I’m going to kill you.”

Technoblade turned just in time to see the palace doors slam shut behind an agitated Tommy and giggling Wilbur. Wilbur had one arm raised above his head, a golden dandelion pinched between his fingers. He snickered as Tommy made a jump for it only to fall just short.

“It can’t even be considered treason if I kill you because I’m not from Pogtopia. Take that, dickhead. I—” Tommy abruptly stopped, his blue eyes latching onto Techno first before flicking over to Phil. “Ahh... ‘ello.”

“Dad, I asked Tommy to stay here until the vines are taken care of. He’s got nowhere else to go, and he could help you,” Wilbur said, keeping his arm raised even though Tommy wasn’t paying attention to it anymore.

“That’s fine,” Phil said, waving his hand dismissively. “Actually, if he’s seen the vines, I could use his help estimating how many people we’ll need to fight it off, if it comes here.”

Phil looked at Tommy as he spoke, who immediately nodded.

“Yeah, I’d—I’d love to help.”

Phil smiled. “Good.” He tilted his head, glancing back and forth between the two boys standing in the middle of the foyer. “What have you two been doing outside?”

“Throwing rocks,” Wilbur said at the same time that Tommy replied, “Looking at flowers.”

They glanced at each other, then back at Phil and Technoblade.

“Throwing rocks while looking at flowers,” Wilbur explained.

Phil chuckled. “Well, I hope you had a good night’s sleep, Tommy. And... oh prime. Have you eaten anything yet? I’m so sorry, I’ve been in meetings all morning and—”

“No, no,” Tommy hurried to interject, “don’t worry. Wilbur brought me pancakes.”

Technoblade's attention immediately snapped to Wilbur, whose eyes widened. "You mean your *soggy, bacon* pancakes?" Techno asked.

Wilbur, to his credit, at least looked a *little* guilty.

"I like my pancakes soggy, anyway," Tommy said, oblivious to the death stare Wilbur was receiving. "The eggs were really good."

"Well, um, I'm glad you're doing well. If you're staying longer, do you need anything? Towels? More blankets?" Phil asked.

"Actually—" Tommy glanced down at his clothes. Somehow, they looked cleaner than they had last night. But maybe Techno was just imagining it because of his elevated position on the railing above the stairs. Even if Tommy's clothes *had* gotten cleaned, there was still a faint brown stain smeared across the collar of his white shirt, and a tear in the shoulder of his red vest. The holes in the knees of his baggy cargo pants somehow appeared even bigger than yesterday. "—do you have any extra clothes?"

"Yeah, I can get you some new clothes," Phil assured him. "I'll leave them in your room later, if that's alright?"

Tommy nodded, relief evident on his face. He slid closer to Wilbur, eyes shifting back to Techno for a moment before looking down.

"Well... if that's all," Wilbur said, blindly reaching behind him to grab Tommy's wrist, "I'm going to give Tommy a quick tour of the castle so he can get around on his own. Call if you need me."

With that, Wilbur tugged Tommy towards the hallway to their right, disappearing around the bend in a matter of seconds.

As soon as they were gone, Techno swiveled to Phil. "You see why I don't trust this kid? He's got Wilbur wrapped around his finger. And now you, too? You're gonna let him *stay* here?"

Phil rolled his eyes fondly, turning back to the hall. They continued down it, side by side.

"Tommy seems nice enough to me. And Wilbur looks happy. Happier than he's been in... in a while."

Techno averted his gaze to his feet. Phil wasn't wrong, and Techno hated that he knew why. Ever since the queen, Philza's wife, had passed away two years ago, Wilbur had been distant. He wasn't miserable, *per se*. It had been two years, and he'd had to learn to live with the grief pretty quickly considering he was the crown prince. But he wasn't the same as he'd been before. For starters, the childish way he'd been picking on Tommy in the foyer was a side of Wilbur that Techno hadn't seen in a while. In fact, the last time he remembered Wilbur acting that way around him was when they were fifteen and sixteen, respectively. Just a year before Wil's mom got sick.

“I’m still not sure,” Techno finally said. “Somethin’s off about him. I feel like he’s not tellin’ us everything.”

“Have you talked to him?”

“Well... no.”

Phil shrugged. They’d made it to his office, and he held the door open for Techno before stepping through after him. “Then I wouldn’t worry about it. Techno, I trust you. I trust your judgement. But even you kept your secrets when you first showed up here, and I let you.”

Phil took a seat behind his desk, and Techno slipped into the one in front of him. The cushion beneath him was familiar, the same as it had always been. So was the rest of Phil’s office, come to think of it. The same paintings from eight years ago hung on the cream colored walls. The same window that looked out over the field was still open, pale green curtains gathering dust because Phil rarely closed them. The same pens were in a jar on the desk—the same inkpot next to it because Phil liked to refill it instead of throwing inkpot after inkpot away.

Maybe Phil liked a little bit of stability as much as he did, Techno thought.

“Plus, he’s just a kid. I’m not about to kick him out if he’s got nowhere else to go. And he really could help us with these vines,” Phil continued.

He’d opened a drawer while Techno was thinking. From it he pulled two pieces of rolled up parchment paper. He placed the papers both down on the desk, nudged the drawer shut, and only then did his blue eyes reconnect with Techno’s.

“What are those?” Techno asked when it became clear Phil wasn’t going to unroll them.

Phil sucked in a breath. “Techno, you know how you hear... voices? Occasionally?”

Slowly, Techno nodded. He’d heard voices for as long as he could remember. When he was younger, he’d struggled with them, and it’d been part of the reason the other kids made fun of him so much. They called him crazy, and joked that the voices probably came from Ghast—a legendary creature in the Nether who was told to strike down humans by the sound of its voice alone.

Techno had never told them how, when they teased him, the voices screamed for their blood.

He’d gotten better at managing them over the last eight years. After moving in with Phil, they’d quieted down quite a bit. In fact, the only time they really showed up anymore was when Technoblade was out in the fields practicing with his sword, or whenever he caught sight of fresh blood.

Honestly, he didn’t mind them as much as he used to. They were good company out in the fields. And, on rare occasions, they could even be funny.

“Well,” Phil continued, “I... I’ve been having this dream. It’s not really like your voices, actually. That was a poor analogy. Cause you have a lot of voices, but this is just one dream

over and over again, and it's not even—”

“Phil, just *tell* me,” Techno interrupted, leaning across the desk to grab Phil’s hands in his. They'd been gesturing around as he spoke, but now they stilled.

Phil swallowed, then nodded his head. “Right. Right. Um, so, I dreamt about the vines for a week before Tommy showed up here, before I even knew what they were. That’s why I believed him when he told us about them. I’d seen them before, but... but in a dream. And Techno—”

Phil unrolled the first piece of parchment, turning it so Techno could see. It was a charcoal sketch of twisting, thorn-covered vines that stretched out over the field between Pogtopia and the Green Forest. They coiled around the trees at the edge of the clearing, and slunk through the grass like snakes, crushing clusters of wildflowers under their weight. Perhaps the most unsettling part of the drawing, though, was the background. Back behind the trees, half-hidden by shadows, were people. Hundreds of them. They were silhouetted against white flames that licked and tore at the grass before them. Clouds of thick, black smoke rose from the flames, painting the sky a dark gray.

“This is what the vines looked like. Is that not exactly how Tommy described them? And the people in the back, I think that’s the infected army.”

Techno frowned and glanced down at the other piece of parchment. “So you think this dream’s like... a vision? What’s that paper, then?”

“If it’s not a vision, it’s certainly a weird as fuck coincidence.” Phil said, nudging the second piece of parchment over to Techno. “This is the last part of the dream, right before I wake up. I drew it this morning.”

Techno carefully rolled back the paper. Bit by bit, the drawing revealed itself. This one was done in color—bright reds and golden yellows slowly unfurling in an image that immediately made the hairs on Techno’s arms prickle upwards.

And that was when the voices started. They were quiet at first, the way they usually were while training in the fields. But slowly they rose, a steady crescendo getting louder and louder as Techno stared down at an image of *death*.

“*Pogtopia’s burning,*” one murmured.

“*Blood,*” said another.

“*Blood for the Blood God.*”

“*Look at the castle.*”

“*Fire.*”

“*They’re bleeding.*”

“*Fighting.*”

“Death.”

“That’s a lotta damage...”

Techno rolled the scroll back up and tossed it back to Phil without looking at him. His chest rose and fell erratically as the voices died down. It was as if he’d just fought off an entire army. Maybe he had.

When he finally gathered himself enough to look up, Phil was watching him quietly. Patiently. The way only a king could.

“What do you need me to do?” Techno asked.

Chapter End Notes

back from my trip with chapter 4!! 5 will be coming pretty soon, because I really would like to get this all up BEFORE school starts again.

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Glitter & Gold

Chapter Summary

Every time the blade came close, Tommy thought of Dream. Dream had never hurt him with his sword, but he'd jokingly swing it at him sometimes, always stopping just short. It made Tommy nervous, because Dream sometimes did the same thing with his fists. And sometimes those didn't stop short.

What would happen if Dream decided not to stop the sword?

//

Golden grass, glittering swords... it's about time we had a sparring scene :))

Chapter Notes

Song from chapter title is ["Glitter & Gold"](#) by Barns Courtney.

CW: mentions of abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy swept his fingers through the soft grass around him, marveling at the way it rippled like water under his touch. He and Wilbur were out in the gardens again, but this time it was mid-afternoon, and they'd hunkered down under a willow tree to stay cool.

It had been a few days since Tommy had arrived, and the amount of sheer generosity he'd been shown was almost overwhelming. It was a stark contrast to his life back in the SMP lands, before he'd run here to escape.

Back there had been closed doors and sealed offices, yelled words and sharp hands. Here, the doors—even King Philza's office door—were almost always left unlocked. And so far not a single person had raised their voice at him or shoved him around.

Tommy glanced down at his arms. The bruises were fading. Soon they wouldn't be visible to anyone who wasn't looking for them.

A corner of his mouth twitched upward at the thought.

“What?”

Wilbur's voice cut through his thoughts, and Tommy looked up to see the older boy staring at him. “You have that look on your face like you're conspiring, again.”

Tommy scowled. "I'm not."

"How's your wrist?"

Tommy lifted his left hand, examining both sides of the bandage job Wilbur had done on it two days ago.

"It's poggers," he said, grinning.

He'd made up the word after a long conversation with Wilbur on his first full day in Pogtopia. He'd been asking about Pogtopia's name, and why it sounded so funny, and then suddenly he'd made up the word "pog," which was quickly followed by the invention of "poggers."

Wilbur rolled his eyes, smiling fondly. "What is it with you and that word?"

"Wh *aat*? I like it! It's *pog*."

Wilbur chuckled, leaning forward to pluck a dandelion from the grass between them. He strung it between the strings of his guitar before giving them a quick strum, vibrating the dandelion's soft petals.

Tommy sighed, shifting to lay down in the grass. It was tall enough that the strands invaded his vision of Wilbur. He could just barely see the speck of yellow in Wilbur's guitar, and the mop of curly brown hair that gleamed in the afternoon sun.

He stared up at the leaves above him as they trembled and swayed in the breeze.

He liked it here.

Besides the fact that it was beautiful, the people here were nice, too. Wilbur, of course, but also Tommy's guard on the first day—Quackity. Tommy had also had the opportunity to meet Phil and Technoblade over the past three days, although his interactions with them had been mostly in passing.

Phil was kind, and frequently asked Tommy if he was comfortable or if he needed anything. He'd given him a few sets of new clothes, one of which he was wearing now. It was a plain white shirt with three-quarter sleeves to block out the sun, and a blue vest similar to Tommy's red one, but with buttons instead of laces to connect the two sides, and made of higher quality fabric. Golden thread created flowery designs in the vest, but they were just barely visible, only really noticeable in the sun. His pants were also three-quarter, now, and a deep, rich, brown color. They had a distinct lack of pockets, which bothered Tommy to no end, but at least they were clean. Wilbur had also lent him a pair of his old boots, and Tommy wore them now, the brown laces drawn up tight around his ankles.

Compared to Wilbur and Phil, Technoblade was more distant, but Tommy couldn't judge. He would probably keep his distance, too, if a stranger showed up at his house in the SMP. Besides, he liked Technoblade. He was interesting. Wilbur had told him stories of their

childhood together, and Tommy had been enthralled by Wilbur's explanation of he and Technoblade's old sparring sessions in the fields.

Of course, it helped that Wilbur was a very good storyteller. He could make up a story about eating sand and it would still be interesting.

"Techno?" Wilbur's voice suddenly asked. "Come to join us? I was just about to practice my next song."

Tommy sat up, turning around to look for Technoblade. He was coming up the hill, pink braid swinging and face glistening with sweat from the summer heat. In his hand was a glistening purple sword.

Tommy swallowed. He'd seen a sword like that before, back in the SMP. From the purple sheen coating it, he knew it was enchanted.

Dream had an enchanted sword. He called it Nightmare.

"Only partially to be ironic," Dream had told him once, at dinner. *"Mostly, it's just a scary name. Don't you think?"*

Tommy shivered, refocusing on the grass below his palms. He'd gotten away from Dream. He was in Pogtopia now. He didn't need to think about him. He didn't—

"Actually, I'm here for sparring lessons. Phil wants me to teach you," Technoblade said, cutting through Tommy's spiraling.

"You already did teach me," Wilbur replied.

Technoblade gave Wilbur a deadpan stare. "When you were *thirteen*. It's been a while, and if those vines and their army decide to come here, we need you to be prepared." He shifted his attention to Tommy. "*Both* of you."

Tommy's eyes widened. "Me?" he asked, flushing pink when his voice cracked.

Technoblade nodded. "That would be implied by the word 'both'."

Tommy shared a dumbfounded look with Wilbur, but Techno was already headed off down the hill.

"Come on," he called over his shoulder, "combat waits for no man."

—»-»-»-»—

Tommy had never been taught to hold a sword before. Techno showed him how to grip the hilt, one hand over the other, and then how to swiftly transfer the weapon back and forth

between hands. He showed him how to swing precisely, how to block, how to flip the sword so he could use it backhanded—something Tommy had never even thought of doing before. They used these practice swings as a warm up, all three of them going through the motions together.

With Wilbur, Technoblade demonstrated parries and ripostes. Tommy watched from the grass as they fought back and forth, sunlight glinting off of their clashing blades as they turned and jumped, parried and riposted, dodged and attacked.

“Chin up,” Technoblade would occasionally say over the sound of metal on metal. Or, “shoulders down,” “lean left,” “move your feet quicker,” “bend your knees.”

It was twenty straight minutes of this before Wilbur stopped, panting and shaking his head to tell Techno he couldn’t go on. And then it was Tommy’s turn.

Tommy gripped the sword Techno had handed him tightly between two hands. Techno had outlined a wide circle in the grass around them, instructing Tommy that if either of them stepped outside of it, they were automatically out.

“Alright, first let’s start easy. I’ll attack, and you go offensive.”

“*Offensive*. I can be offensive,” Tommy muttered to himself, joking, but immediately raised his sword up to block Techno’s.

“Good. Now circle my sword and push it down.”

Tommy did, and just like that, the spar began.

Back and forth for what felt like hours, Tommy and Technoblade sparred. The first round lasted all of ten seconds before Tommy fell out of the ring. The second round wasn’t much better. By the third round, he was sweating. By the fourth round, he was panting. By the fifth, his arms burned.

By the sixth, he was angry.

Frustration made him swing harder, his sword clanging against Techno’s faster and faster.

“Right foot forwards. Bend your knees,” Techno instructed, and how calmly he spoke only made Tommy angrier.

How could Techno do this so effortlessly? Even Wilbur had struggled a little bit during his session, but Technoblade never wobbled, never set a foot out of place, caught every swing and jab of Tommy’s sword—easily. He fought like it was as easy as breathing. Beating him was impossible!

“Don’t give up now,” Techno said, circling Tommy’s sword and swinging upwards.

“Sometimes... sometimes it’s good to think that you’re fightin’ *for* something. It’ll give you the adrenaline you need to push through.”

Tommy huffed, catching his balance again and swinging forwards. Techno caught the blade easily, then sidestepped to aim a blow at Tommy's side. Tommy had noticed that Techno never swung particularly hard, always careful enough that he would never actually hit Tommy. It should have reassured him—Techno wasn't actually trying to hurt him—but instead it made his insides boil.

Every time the blade came close, Tommy thought of Dream. Dream had never hurt him with his sword, but he'd jokingly swing it at him sometimes, always stopping just short. It made Tommy nervous, because Dream sometimes did the same thing with his fists. And sometimes those *didn't* stop short.

What would happen if Dream decided not to stop the sword?

You'd parry it.

Tommy swiftly stepped out of the way of Techno's sword. It didn't matter, of course, because Techno was quick and his sword swung back down at Tommy a second later, but this time Tommy was ready for it. He raised his sword, blocking Techno's, then circled and swung down while taking a step forward. Techno, naturally took one back.

The sun beamed down on them as they fought, but Tommy hardly felt it. He was sweating and breathing hard, but his arms were finally steady and his sword swung with purpose.

He wasn't fighting Techno anymore. He was fighting Dream.

"Good," Techno grunted at first. Then, a few seconds later, "*Good!*"

Tommy swung again, and Techno just barely caught the edge of his blade. He could see the edge of the circle behind Techno, just one more step, one more swing, and he could—

Before Tommy could do much of *anything*, Techno leapt upwards, flipping right over Tommy's head. Tommy spun around to face him, to block, but it was too late. The tip of the glowing purple sword hovered just inches from Tommy's chin.

Techno lightly tapped Tommy's shoulder with the flat edge. They were both panting.

"You're out," Techno said, but his eyes were glittering, and a smile spread across his face. "Good work, kid. You're an even quicker learner than Wil was."

"Hey, I was also thirteen," Wilbur shot from the grass.

"A year of difference? Wowww." Technoblade rolled his eyes, and Tommy giggled.

"Let's go inside and make lemonade," Wilbur suggested, pushing himself up from the grass. "I hate sparring."

"Fine. I think that's been enough for today, anyway. It's getting hot out," Technoblade responded, and neither of them had the guts to tell him that it had already been hot outside for them.

Tommy handed Techno his sword back—not missing the proud way the older boy nodded at him—before darting off after Wil.

He felt... tired, hot, sweaty... but in a good way. He'd never fought with a sword before. Dream had never let him. But at the end of that fight it felt almost natural to him. The hilt fit perfectly in his hand, and he'd swung the blade almost as smoothly as Techno did.

“Does your hand hurt at all?” Wilbur asked once Tommy caught up with him.

Tommy glanced down at his wrist. Huh, he hadn't really thought about it during the fight. Now that the adrenaline was wearing off, he supposed it did hurt a little bit, but during the fight he hadn't felt a thing.

“Not really,” Tommy answered honestly.

“Good,” Wilbur said, “that means I wrapped it right. We should change the bandage when we get inside, though. It's probably all sweaty.”

“Oh. Yeah, a little.”

Wilbur grinned, reaching over to tussle Tommy's hair. “You did good out there. Techno was impressed.”

“You think?”

Wilbur nodded, and Tommy felt something large and strange and warm expand in his chest.

“You think we could spar again, sometime?” he asked, bouncing excitedly as the castle gates grew closer across the field.

Wilbur laughed. “I think we will be sparring a lot now, Tommy. Now, are you thirsty? Because I am absolutely *parched*. I think Phil has ingredients in the kitchen for lemonade...”

“What's lemonade?”

“You've never had lemonade?”

Tommy shook his head.

“Oh you deprived child. Techno can show you the ways of the blade, but allow me to show you the way of *lemonade* ...”

Chapter End Notes

sparring scenes my beloved
no joke, I actually really enjoy writing fight scenes so... expect more of those! also,
frequent updates are coming because I've been editing several chapters at a time and

want to have them all up before I go back to uni in August.

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Where Is Your Rider

Chapter Summary

Bang!

Wilbur jumped as the doors to the throne room were violently pushed open. He and Phil turned to see Tommy standing there, panting as if he'd just run a mile.

"They're here," he said breathlessly. "They're here."

//

Another visitor arrives in Pogtopia, and Wilbur finally remembers where he's seen Tommy before.

Chapter Notes

Song from the chapter title is "[Where Is Your Rider](#)" by The Oh Hellos.

CW: mentions of abuse, a bit of a panic attack.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After all the complaining Techno had done that morning about having to train Tommy on top of Wilbur, Phil was pleasantly surprised to walk in on all three of them sitting around the kitchen table, sipping lemonade and laughing together. It was sweet—the picture of domesticity. Or, it would have been, if not for the complete and utter disaster surrounding them.

Sugar and lemon juice was *everywhere*. The sticky substances were spread all over the kitchen counter. A puddle of spilled water dribbled down onto the tile floor below. The three boys were seated around the kitchen table, each with a cup of what Phil could only assume was lemonade in their hands. If they noticed the dripping water, no one had made a move to clean it up. Techno held a spoon backwards in his free hand, and was brandishing it out like a sword when Phil walked in. The whole kitchen fell silent.

"...Hi, Dad!" Wilbur finally greeted. "Did you know Tommy's never had lemonade before?"

Phil blinked. Then blinked again. Then he shook his head, backing towards the door. "Nope. If I don't see the mess, it doesn't exist."

"Wait! Dad! You should have seen our sparring practice today. Even Technoblade admitted that we did well. He was just re-enacting it!"

"I definitely was not," Technoblade said, lowering the spoon to the table.

Phil chuckled, turning back to face his sons. Well, two of them. The third boy sat at the edge of his chair, swirling a spoon around and around inside his cup of lemonade. He watched Phil with slight apprehension, the way he had ever since he'd arrived.

Although Tommy had been warming up to him recently, the only one he seemed completely comfortable around was Wilbur. It was endearing, really, and it made Phil happy to see Wilbur so excited again. Still, he had to wonder what his son had done to earn Tommy's unwavering loyalty.

"I'll be happy to hear all about it later," Phil said, "but right now I need the three of you to help me clean up and set up the throne room. We have a visitor coming."

"A visitor?" Wilbur asked, frowning. "Who?"

Phil shook his head. "I'll explain later, but it's someone who can help us with the vines. Right now we need to hurry and clean up. They'll be here soon."

One of Techno's eyebrows rose, and Wilbur traded a quizzical look with Tommy, but all three set down their cups.

Phil pulled three rags from the kitchen cabinets and tossed them onto the table.

"Techno? You're on kitchen duty. Tommy, if you'll help dust and sweep in the halls that would be appreciated. Wil, you're on throne room duty with me."

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Tommy hummed to himself as he swept. It was his disc's song, happy and upbeat—"Cat," it was called, according to the green labeling around the center.

He swished the broom to the familiar rhythm, creating a music all his own as he swept down the castle hallways and dusted off the various vases and ceramic statues. The sun was beginning to sink outside, and the whole castle seemed to glow because of it. Orange rays streaked across the hall, creating squared patterns on the opposite wall and allowing Tommy to see his shadow as he passed.

He stopped at one of the windows, squinting out against the sun, and that's when he noticed it. A spiderweb, tucked neatly into the upper corner of the window.

Tommy grinned, thinking of Wilbur and his distaste for spiders. If there was a spider in the web, he could catch it and bring it to him. The only problem was the web was far too high for him to reach it. He'd have to get a chair, or...

Tommy flipped the broom upside down, then stretched up on tip-toe and extended the bristles up towards the web. It caught, and Tommy gave a quick twirl to dislodge the web before bringing the broom back down. Curiously, he examined the twines. Was there a spider in

there somewhere? He hoped he hadn't killed it. He'd been careful to be gentle, but he didn't see any of the little creatures on the broom. Maybe it hadn't been on the web. Oh well.

A scuffling sound came from outside, and Tommy looked up.

Outside the window were the palace gates, tall and golden in the setting sun. Beyond them, at the bottom of the hill to the left, was Pogtopia's village, but it was so far away Tommy could barely see it. He did, however, see the three people standing at the gate. One had his hands wrapped around the bars, and was pressing his face against them as if to get as close to the palace as possible. The other stood just behind him, wearing a blue shirt with heavy armor pulled over it. He had his arms crossed, and was watching the first man with clear annoyance. The last man was tall and green, seated upon an auburn colored horse. Tommy instantly recognized all of them.

His lungs constricted, and he stumbled back from the window. The air burned in his throat, and his eyes were already watering at the thought of darkening bruises, slammed doors, and sugar-coated words that ultimately meant nothing. The broom fell, forgotten, to the floor as Tommy turned and ran towards the throne room. He needed to find Wilbur. He needed to get out. He needed to *hide*.

Dream. Dream was here.

—»-»-»-»-»-—

Wilbur sneezed for the fifth consecutive time as dust billowed up around him.

"For fuck's sake, Phil. How long has it been since these have been cleaned?" he asked, holding up the edge of one of the throne room's heavy, blood-red curtains.

Phil hummed from the opposite side of the room. He was busy wiping down a vase of pink roses and refilling their water with a silver pitcher he'd brought from the kitchen. He'd tied his hair back in a ponytail, and removed his official robes so they wouldn't get dirty while cleaning.

He looked like less of a ruler, and more of the dad he was meant to be, Wilbur thought.

"A few decades, probably." Phil shrugged, and Wilbur grimaced.

"That's disgusting."

"At least they're just curtains. We rarely touch them."

Wilbur sniffled, rubbing his nose against the back of his arm. "Who is this person, anyway?"

Phil sighed. He walked over to Wilbur and wordlessly took the curtain from him, handing him the vase and pitcher instead. Wilbur sniffed gratefully.

“Dream, the SMP lands’ ruler. He sent me a letter the day after Tommy arrived, warning us about the vines. He asked if he could come by to discuss them with me, and I said yes.”

“The SMP lands? Hasn’t Pogtopia been on bad terms with them for like... ever?”

Phil shrugged, shaking out the end of the curtain. “We’ve been on... rocky terms. But that’s why it’s so important this meeting goes well. I think Dream might want to combine forces against this new army coming, and with both of our armies combined we’d stand a much better chance. Plus, it’d be nice to be in good standing with them again.”

Wilbur scrubbed at the bottom of the vase, where dried leaves had stuck themselves to the ceramic. “If you want to be allies with them, why haven’t you met with Dream before?”

“I have,” Phil said, moving on to the next curtain. Wilbur trailed him from a safe distance. “We’ve met a couple times before, years ago. You’ve actually met him as well. Though, you were only ten, so you might not remember.”

“So why...?”

Phil blew out a breath as he shook the curtain, and dust scattered. “Dream’s a... difficult person to deal with. He’s not necessarily unpleasant, but he’s good at politics and likes to get his way. Can be kind of violent, sometimes. It’s not a bad thing, but when getting his way involves taking Pogtopia’s land...”

“He wants our land?”

“He wanted some of it,” Phil clarified, “but that was years ago, and the laws prevented him from getting it. I don’t think we need to worry about that today.”

“Why did he want it?”

Phil shrugged. “Expansion? More power? Land is a pretty good indicator of power here. You know that.”

Wilbur nodded distantly. He dug back in his memories, searching for any remembrance of meeting Dream, but nothing stood out to him. He remembered Phil taking him on his business trips years ago, but he didn’t really remember many of the people they met with. There were just so many of them. Plus, all they’d talked about was boring adult stuff. Wilbur had been ten, and back then he’d been more interested in woodlice than he was international politics. Needless to say, he hadn’t paid much attention.

Bang!

Wilbur jumped as the doors to the throne room were violently pushed open. He and Phil turned to see Tommy standing there, panting as if he’d just run a mile.

“They’re here,” he said breathlessly. “They’re here.”

Wilbur hurried down the hall after Phil, Tommy right beside him. Phil had asked Wilbur, as next in line, to be present when they greeted Dream. Tommy was just following because, well, that was what Tommy did.

Something was up with him, though. He stuck close to Wilbur—closer than usual—and kept glancing around skittishly, like he was waiting for someone to jump out and ambush them. His face was pale, and as they got closer and closer to the foyer his expression grew tighter and tighter, as if he was about to cry.

They reached the end of the hall, and were just about to turn onto the staircase when they collided with Techno.

“Dream’s here,” Phil explained, pulling his robes tighter around himself. Wilbur had watched him throw them on in a hurry as they’d left the throne room.

“I know,” Technoblade responded, “I was just coming to tell you.”

The two of them, Phil and Techno, continued down the stairs together. But when Wilbur went to follow them, he was stopped by a hand grabbing onto his sleeve.

Tommy was white as a ghost, and his whole body shook as he looked up at Wilbur. His eyes shone with fear, and his fingers were turning white from how hard he was clenching Wilbur’s shirt.

“Tommy? What’s wrong?” Wilbur asked, immediately searching for an injury.

“You didn’t... you didn’t tell Phil anything I told you in the gardens, did you?”

Wilbur frowned. “Of course not. Why? What’s the matter?”

“Hide me.”

“What?”

The sound of the castle gates clanging open came, muffled, through the windows. Then voices, steadily growing louder. A called “*Hello, Dream!*” from Phil.

Tommy’s eyes widened. He squeezed Wilbur’s sleeve impossibly tighter, pulling them both further back into the hall and away from the open foyer.

“Wilbur, *hide me* .”

Wilbur glanced down at Tommy’s face, the kid’s blue eyes desperate, and it suddenly clicked into place. He knew where he’d seen him before. Those same wide blue eyes had stared up at him from behind the legs of a tall man dressed in green, years ago. The boy and older man had been standing under the dark awning of the SMP’s stony, moss-covered castle as Wilbur had been leaving with Phil. He’d turned back to wave, and his eyes had caught on the child’s bright blond hair. It was like gold, how brightly it had shone.

“When I was about six or seven, this guy pulled me out. He gave me a home. A family. We were like family,” Tommy’s voice echoed in his head.

“Can be kind of violent, sometimes,” Phil had said.

“We’ve met a couple times before, years ago. You’ve actually met him as well. Though, you were only ten, so you might not remember...”

“Wilbur, please .”

Wilbur blinked, dread and horror sinking in his stomach as he stared at the teary-eyed boy in front of him. Dream. Tommy had lived with Dream. The rapidly fading bruises on his arms were from *Dream* . Dream was *here* .

And from the sound of it, they were already coming towards the stairs. There was no time for Tommy to go very far.

Wilbur grabbed Tommy’s arm, yanking him back and pointing towards a dark wooden cabinet close to the throne room doors. It was decorative, meant only to support the giant, ceramic vase on top of it, but Wilbur knew from many games of hide-and-seek with Technoblade that its doors were fully functional. Tommy was small enough that he could easily fit inside of it.

“There,” Wilbur said, panic leaking into his voice. “Inside. Go.”

Tommy scampered off down the hall, and Wilbur had just enough time to watch him cram himself into the tiny space and shut the door before Phil’s voice spoke behind him.

“Wilbur! There you are. Dream, this is Wilbur, my son.”

Wilbur turned around, quickly smoothing his expression into one of a prince’s. The picture of calm. He was *calm* . Calm like the ocean. Calm like the summer sky. Calm like the color blue.

Dream was not blue. In fact, the first thing Wilbur noticed about him was the sheer amount of *green* he wore. Even his crown, silver and glistening, was embedded with emeralds.

Dream nodded his head at Wilbur, a small smile stretching across his freckled face. His eyes—also green—glittered as he took in the young prince. “Yes, I remember Wilbur. It’s been a while, hasn’t it? The last time I saw you, I think you were... what? Ten?”

Wordlessly, Wilbur nodded. He didn’t trust himself to speak.

“You’ve grown up well. Taller than I expected you to be.”

“Thanks,” Wilbur grit out, trying his best not to think about socking Dream in the face.

There were two others standing behind the group. One was tall, with dark black hair tied back by a white bandana. The other was shorter, with a blue sweater poking out from underneath

his armor. As Wilbur looked closer, he noticed the second man had multicolored eyes: one brown and one blue. Both men wore sets of shiny, metal armor over their clothes.

Dream must have noticed Wilbur looking, because he gestured back at the two with a smile. “These are my two most trusted knights, Sapnap and George. They agreed to come with me today, just for company’s sake.” He shifted, leaning into one hip and crossing his arms. The easy smile was still on his face, but Wilbur thought he saw a corner of it waver as he continued. “It’s awfully difficult to cross through the Green Forest alone, you know.”

Tommy had crossed through the Green Forest alone. If he truly came from the SMP, there was no other way he could have made it to Pogtopia.

Wilbur forced himself to nod politely. “Of course.”

For a moment, no one moved. Dream kept his arms crossed, staring at Wilbur with that insufferable smile still on his face. Wilbur stared right back. Sapnap coughed awkwardly.

“Well, uh, let’s go to the throne room where we can at least sit down,” Phil finally said, saving Wilbur from his growing anger.

He fell into step beside Technoblade as all six of them headed towards the throne room doors... and Tommy.

Prime, what had he gotten himself into now?

Chapter End Notes

g-george is in florida?? jokes jokes... unless... 🙄🙄

The Adults Are Talking

Chapter Summary

King Dream took King Philza's hand in his. His eyes were shining. "We have a deal." They shook, and Techno did not miss the way Wilbur's fingernails left indents in his palms.

//

Phil and Dream make a plan. Techno learns the truth.

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is ["The Adults Are Talking"](#) by The Strokes.

CW: mention of abuse, mini panic attack

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno wasn't sure why Wilbur looked ready to smite Dream where he stood, but he wasn't about to argue with him. The SMP's king wasn't completely unpleasant, but he was certainly cocky, and there was a gleam to his eyes that Techno didn't like.

Not many things had the power to scare Technoblade, and Dream was no exception. But he did make him a little... uneasy.

Technoblade shifted in his place next to Wilbur. They were standing to the side of Phil's throne, not too far away, but far enough that it was clear who was in charge. Dream had been offered a chair, but declined, and now he stood in the middle of the room with his two guards—Techno had already forgotten their names—flanking either side of him.

"You wanted to speak with me?" Phil asked, rocking back on his feet.

If Dream was going to stand, Phil was going to stand. Techno knew his adoptive father well enough to know that that was the only reason he hadn't sat down yet. He liked to begin, at least, on equal footing.

"Yes," Dream began, "I wanted to talk to you about those vines I wrote to you about."

"The bloodvines."

Dream nodded, although something in his face changed at the word. His brows drew together ever so slightly, and his green eyes darkened.

“Yes, them. They’ve started to grow into my kingdom, and although we’ve been fighting them off, I fear they will still make it into Pogtopia.” Dream stepped forwards as he spoke, gesturing towards the window and the forest beyond. “They’ve already entered the Green Forest in some areas.”

“Well, what do you propose we do about it? Have you found a successful way of warding them off?”

Dream nodded. “Fire and simply slicing them will slow them down, but as for killing them, I believe we need to go to the roots and kill it there.”

“The Badlands.”

“Exactly.”

Phil frowned. “You said ‘we’? Are you... are you wanting to team up?”

“That depends. Are you?”

Techno looked over as Wilbur stiffened beside him. His brother’s eyes were narrowed, and he’d clenched his hands tightly behind his back. He kept glancing towards the doors leading out of the throne room, as if waiting for someone to appear, but no one was there. What the hell was up with him?

Techno turned back to the conversation just in time to see Phil nod.

“I think, in times like these, it’s important to band together. We have a common enemy, and together we’d stand a far better chance.”

Dream’s eyes drifted around the throne room, taking in the velvet curtains, the vases of roses, and the twinkling chandelier hanging from the ceiling. When they finally returned to Phil, they were almost glowing.

“I think you’re right,” Dream said. “We should team up.”

Phil’s breath of relief was enough to make Techno’s shoulders relax. So it was settled; they’d be teaming up with the SMP against the bloodvines. That was good, Techno supposed. It meant a bigger army on their side.

“There is a small catch, though,” Dream said, interrupting Techno’s thoughts. “In exchange for helping you out, I need a favor.”

Phil raised an eyebrow. “A favor?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of favor?”

Dream stepped back, waving his hands noncommittally as he began to pace the floor. “Nothing big. In fact, I haven’t even decided on it yet.”

“Not land?”

Dream paused his pacing, considering, then resumed with a shake of his head. “No. It won’t be land. I haven’t wanted Pogtopia’s land in... many years. Not since we last formally spoke, probably.”

He caught Phil’s dubious gaze, and chuckled. A single, ringed finger raised up to draw an X over his chest. “I promise. I won’t ask for your land.”

Phil eyed him for a second longer before dipping his head. “Alright. So you and I will team up, and in exchange for protecting my land, I’ll owe you a... a favor.”

“It’ll be small,” Dream assured him. “I don’t like asking big things of people.”

“Okay...” Phil said. He brought his hands together in front of himself, drawing himself up to his full height. “I can do that. But just know that if you try anything—try to take any land from me, or mess with my people—the vines won’t be the only thing your country has to fear.”

Dream nodded, his expression completely sober. “I understand. I give my word, I won’t mess with your land or the citizens of it.”

Seemingly satisfied, Philza cracked a shaky smile and bowed his head. “Good.”

His sandals shuffled against the marble floor as he descended the three, thin steps to the floor Dream stood on. He offered the green king his hand.

“So, we have a deal?”

King Dream took King Philza’s hand in his. His eyes were shining. “We have a deal.”

They shook, and Techno did not miss the way Wilbur’s fingernails left indents in his palms.

—»-»-»-»—

When they left the hall twenty minutes later, they’d managed to devise a plan. To cut the bloodvines off at their roots, both Dream and Philza would take a group of people through the desert to the Badlands, where they would use TNT to blow up the vines. According to Dream, his army had already traveled to the Badlands to investigate, and had determined the only way of destroying the roots was with TNT. Stacks and stacks of it.

Supposedly, the roots stemmed from an underground palace in the middle of the Badlands. Dream’s army hadn’t gone down into it on their exploration mission, but Dream explained the only reason why was because the vines were so thick in that area that they physically couldn’t. Not without TNT to blow them all up, first.

With Phil, they planned a trip back. Combining their resources, they'd concluded that they should be able to get enough TNT to blow up the outer vines, plus some extra for inside the palace. Once they were inside, it was only a matter of placing enough TNT to kill the roots.

Of course, then there was the army.

"Do you think there's any way to reverse the vines' influence on people?" Phil had asked.

Dream frowned. *"I'm not sure. Maybe once the vines are gone, the possession will fade as well."*

"I can't leave the castle unattended if I go with you to the Badlands. If the army comes —"

"I can stay here," Wilbur had spoken up, and Techno had turned to stare at him. *"You've told me your plans for if the army arrives. I know what to do, and so does Quackity. I can stay and keep watch while you leave."*

Phil had shaken his head, brow pinched. *"No. Wil..."*

"What? I'm eighteen, and training to take the throne anyway—"

Techno watched the way Wilbur held himself higher, raising his chin slightly as he and his father faced each other.

"—let me do this. You obviously want to go, and it won't be a long journey. The Badlands are only, what, a week's travel away? I can watch over Pogtopia while you're gone."

Phil had argued, but Wilbur rebutted every argument with the calm persuasion of a future ruler. Even as his voice shook speaking to Dream, he'd held himself together. Techno stood taller at his side, pride tugging the corners of his mouth upwards.

Wilbur would be a good king, one day. Whenever Phil decided it was time to retire, there was no doubt in Techno's mind that Wilbur would be ready to replace him. And Pogtopia would love him.

So it was decided. In a few days time, Phil would leave with Dream and his army for the Badlands. Wilbur would stay here, keep watch over the kingdom. And if worse came to worst, Quackity and the rest of the royal guard was here. Phil would only be taking one soldier with him: Techno.

Like Wilbur, Techno had stood his ground and demanded Phil take him with. He hated to admit it, but his father was getting older. And although Phil could have brought any of the castle's soldiers with him, Techno was the best. He understood and could protect Phil better than anyone else.

Wilbur had backed him up, and only at Wil's explanation that it would personally give him peace of mind to have Techno go with had Phil reluctantly agreed.

Now they were leaving the hall, trickling out one after the other. The sun had long-since set outside, but candles had been lit by one of the guards, lighting the way back to the foyer. Phil

and Dream were still chatting up ahead, Dream's guards trailing close behind them.

Techno stepped out the door last, following after Wil. He turned back to close it behind them, and that's when he noticed it.

On either side of the throne room doors, wooden storage cabinets held up vases of roses. The cabinet to his right was cracked open, and through the crack between the two doors Techno could see a pair of eyes looking back at him. Familiar eyes.

Tommy gave a frantic shake of his head from inside the cabinet, trying to pull the doors shut. It was dark in there, but his eyes shone bright with a terror Techno had never seen before.

Techno was about to open his mouth, about to ask what the hell Tommy was doing, if he was okay, when Wilbur grabbed his shoulder.

"Don't," the prince whispered. He brushed past Techno to the cabinet, lightly toeing the door shut. When he turned back, his face was stony. He pulled Techno away, down the hall after the rest of the group.

"Don't say anything until Dream's gone," Wilbur whispered, clutching his elbow. "Please."

The words were hissed, spoken between gritted teeth.

Wordlessly, Techno nodded.

What's going on? he wondered as they slipped through the doors at the end of the hall, following after the group ahead. His eyes caught on the tail end of Dream's forest green cloak, embedded with sparkling jewels and golden embroidery, then slid up to the foreign king's face. He was chuckling at something Phil had said, head tossed back and blond hair shining in the candlelight.

Was Tommy hiding from Dream? Why? And why was Wilbur helping him? Was this why Wilbur had looked so distraught during the meeting?

Whatever the reason, Technoblade kept quiet. He followed Wilbur and Phil as they wished Dream safe travels back to the SMP—he refused to stay the night in Pogtopia, saying someone needed to check on the vines in his kingdom—and waved goodbye as they left.

Only after Dream's horse vanished into the valley did Techno turn to confront Wilbur.

"Alright. What...?" Techno trailed off.

Wilbur was already gone.

Tommy did not like the dark. He did not like closed doors, and he especially did not like tight spaces. It was just his luck that his hiding spot had all three.

He sniffled against the tears building behind his eyes. He couldn't help it. The panic in his chest was constrictive, making it harder and harder to breathe. He pulled his clenched fists tighter to his chest, curling up and closing his eyes.

He could pretend to be somewhere else. With Wilbur, in the gardens. Or with Techno, swinging swords in the open field. Anywhere but in this little, dark cabinet all alone.

Tommy scrunched up further, carefully avoiding the cabinet doors. He'd accidentally nudged one open earlier, while everyone was still in the throne room. It was only about an inch out of place, but he'd been trying desperately to close it again when he heard the throne room doors open, and froze.

Phil had walked out first, his green robes just barely brushing the floor beneath him as he walked past. Then Dream, and Tommy's heart had nearly stopped beating as he recognized the familiar bejeweled cloak and silver crown. Following them were George and Sapnap, Dream's highest ranking knights, and then, finally, Wilbur and Techno.

Techno, who had seen him.

Tommy bit his lip until he tasted blood.

Why was Dream here? He knew why Dream was here, Phil had told them the person coming could help with the vines. *Was Phil going to give him back to Dream?* No. Wilbur said he hadn't told Phil, and if he'd been sending him back to Dream they would have been looking for him, not holding a meeting for the past... how long had it been? It felt like hours.

He wanted out. He wanted out, he wanted out, he wanted *out* .

Where was Wilbur?

He hoped Techno hadn't said anything.

Dream was going to find him.

Dream was going to find him.

Dream was going to—

“ *Tommy* .”

Tommy looked up as the cabinet doors swung open and light burst in. Wilbur knelt on the floor outside, and his arms extended outwards just in time for Tommy to launch himself into them.

“I'm so sorry,” Wilbur said, wrapping his arms around Tommy's back. “I'm so sorry. I didn't know. He's gone now.”

Tommy buried his face in Wilbur's white shirt, muffling the tears that just kept coming.

This was so stupid. He shouldn't be crying. He was fourteen, and a big man, and Dream was his family, and... and...

"Why didn't you tell me it was Dream?" Wilbur asked softly, the words vibrating between them.

"I didn't want you to send me back," Tommy choked out.

"That would never happen."

"But Phil—"

"Phil doesn't know Dream is your guardian. And he wouldn't send you back either, not if you didn't want to go. Not if you told him why."

Tommy sniffled. "Did Dream ask about me?"

"I... I don't think so. I missed a bit of the greeting since I was helping you hide, but he didn't mention it during the meeting."

Tommy pulled back, inhaling a stuttering breath and wiping his cheeks. "He doesn't even care about me?"

There was a moment of silence, then Wilbur responded. "Tommy, people who care about you don't try to hurt you."

Tommy knew that. Of course he did. He wouldn't have run away if he didn't. But the reminder still stung, still sent a single tear rolling down his cheek.

"We should head to bed soon," Wilbur said quietly. "It's getting late, and it's been a long day."

Tommy hastily wiped the tear away, standing with Wilbur's help. His knees were sore from being curled into his chest for so long.

"Okay," he mumbled. "But... where are Techno and Phil?"

Wilbur shrugged. "Downstairs still, probably. I came as soon as Dream was gone."

Tommy sniffled wetly, wiping the last of his tears away and looking up at Wilbur. He was wearing his crown, something Tommy didn't see often. The golden curves glittered in the candlelight like the valley river had the day Tommy arrived.

"Thanks, Wilbur," Tommy said.

Wilbur squeezed his shoulder in return, and the two of them set off, leaving the empty cabinet behind.

The door to Wilbur's bedroom clicked shut behind Techno as he stepped inside.

"Wil?" he called, glancing around the lamplit room.

Wilbur's bed was made, warm yellow sheets spread out over a crisp white mattress and pillows. A mahogany chest sat at the foot of it, and Techno knew from past experience that it was filled to the brim with books on just about every subject imaginable.

Beside the bed was Wilbur's desk, tall and wooden and piled high with assorted papers and quills. His bow, engraved with gold, rested against its side.

"Wilbur?" Techno called again, not having received a response.

"I'm here," Wilbur's voice drifted from behind the closed bathroom door. It popped open not even a second later, and Wilbur emerged, smoothing down the hem of his pajama shirt.

"Sorry. Was brushing my teeth."

Techno shook his head. "Nah, don't worry about it. I was just comin' to talk to you. Ah... where's Tommy?"

"He's in his room, probably sleeping."

"Oh." Techno twiddled his thumbs back and forth. "Is he... is he okay?"

Wilbur's eyes flickered down to the floor. He crossed the room to his bed, straightening out the sheets before plopping down onto them. The mattress dipped under his weight—springs squealing.

"I'm not sure," Wilbur said slowly, carefully drawing out each syllable. "He was pretty spooked, but he also told me to stop being clingy when I asked if he wanted me to stay with him, so..."

"Spooked at what? Why was he hiding?"

Wilbur sighed, falling back to stare up at the ceiling. When he didn't answer for a minute, Techno moved across the floor to lay down next to him, pulling one leg up onto the bed and letting the other hang down off the side. They'd done this many times before, as kids, and still now, as eighteen and nineteen-year-olds. Techno could distantly remember lying near the gardens together, surrounded by sweet smelling lavender and blooming roses, in a position not so unlike this one.

Wilbur flipped towards him and propped himself up with an elbow. "It's Dream," he said, as if that explained everything. At Techno's blank stare, he continued. "Dream was Tommy's foster parent before he came here. He ran away from him."

“What? He said he was an orphan.”

“He lied. So did you, when you first came here. Remember?”

“I didn’t lie about not having any family.”

“You lied about where you came from.”

“Ehhh, I’d call that more of ‘withholdin’ information.”

Wilbur leveled him a deadpan expression, but only for a second before a smile cracked across his face, and he shook his head. “You know what’s ridiculous? Remember when I asked you if Tommy seemed familiar? Well, I figured out why I recognized him. Phil and I actually met him before, a long time ago. I couldn’t have been any more than ten, but it was when we went to visit the SMP and met with Dream. Two weeks before you showed up here. Isn’t that crazy?”

“Why’d he leave?”

Wilbur glanced towards the bedroom door, still closed, then back at Techno. He lowered his voice. “Dream hurt him.”

Techno thought back to the night Tommy had arrived in the throne room, fidgety and scared and covered in dirt. He remembered noticing tiny splotches of blue and brown on his arms, but he hadn’t questioned it much. He figured the kid had probably tripped running here, because there weren’t *that* many bruises. Just a couple around his elbows and upper arms—normal places to bruise after falling on them. Plus, it wasn’t really his place to ask, was it? Techno hadn’t wanted people to pry about his past life when he’d first shown up in Pogtopia. He figured Tommy would be the same.

The bruises had faded, and Techno had forgotten about them. Until now.

He nodded slowly, assuring Wilbur he *knew* , and Wilbur’s creased brow relaxed.

“How do you know all this?” Techno asked.

“Tommy told me the day we went out to the gardens,” Wilbur explained. “I asked, and he said it was the person who’d adopted him. He said he got away from them, but...” Wilbur frowned. “I should have known better. Tommy has this idea that where you live is wherever you are at that moment. When I asked if he still lived with him, and he said no...”

“It was because he was living... here?”

Wilbur nodded, rolling back over on the bed and pulling his glasses off. He rested them on the nightstand next to the bed, then looked back at Techno. “You can’t tell anyone, okay? Not Phil, not Quackity, no one.”

“Why not? Dream could go to jail for this, Wil. *Should* go to jail for this.”

Techno wasn't sure why he was getting so worked up about this. He didn't care about Tommy that much, did he? The kid hadn't even been here that long, only a few days, and the most interaction Techno had had with him was the past afternoon, with the sword fighting and lemonade. Had he really managed to wiggle underneath his skin that quickly? Or was it the fact that Techno saw some part of his past self in Tommy, now. Scared and alone. Hurt, but hiding it.

"Tommy asked me not to tell anyone," Wilbur said, placing his palms over his face and rubbing at his eyes. "I don't want to break his trust. He thought we would send him back there."

"We would never do that."

"Yeah, but he doesn't know that," Wilbur said. "Just keep it a secret for now, okay? Dream's gone, so we don't have to worry about it."

"Dream'll be on a trip with Phil in a couple days. What happens when he says somethin' about Tommy, and Phil tells him he's here?"

"Well... you'll be there. You can make sure that doesn't happen—step in when needed."

"Wil, I'm not so sure about this..."

Wilbur averted his attention to the bedroom window. Black iron bars criss-crossed between panes of clear glass, chopping their view of the field, gardens, and the very edge of the village into tiny, square-shaped pieces. It was too dark to see much of anything anyway, though. Everything outside the window was a blur of dark blues and blacks. Light from the village outlined the townhouse roofs and nothing more. As Techno followed Wil's gaze, he caught sight of both his and Wilbur's reflections—just barely highlighted in the flickering lamplight. To anyone else, they didn't look like brothers. Even without their physical differences, Wilbur's current face was a mask of conflicting emotions, showing how much he considered each and every side of his actions, while Techno's was stone cold and serious with just the slightest trace of worry seeping through. Wilbur's was the face of a future king. Techno's, a warrior's. But both faces were still young, still had adolescence clinging to them like moss to a tree.

"I'm not sure about much of anything right now," Wilbur admitted. "I told Phil I could watch over Pogtopia, but what if I can't?" He turned back around, yellow sheets shifting beneath him. "What if something happens, and I can't fix it on my own?"

Techno placed a hand on Wilbur's shoulder. "Then it's a good thing you don't have to. The Castle Guard will be here, and Phil and I will only be one message away. If you need help, it will *always* be provided to you."

Wilbur sank back, his whole body relaxing, and Techno let his hand drop. They sat in comfortable silence for a moment, until a corner of Wil's mouth quirked upwards.

"When did you get so wise, Technoblade?" he teased, brown eyes glinting as he looked over at him.

Techno chuckled. “Maybe it’s all those books you used to give me, finally sinking in.”

“I only gave you the hardest ones because I knew you could handle them.”

“Yeah, as if I didn’t primarily speak Piglin when I came here.”

“And look how quickly you learned.”

Techno laughed, and Wilbur joined him, the two basking in each other’s company while the night blanketed around them.

Eventually, Techno pushed up from the bed. “Alright. I’m headin’ out for the night. Ironically, I kinda wanted to read before goin’ to sleep.”

Wilbur nodded, flopping back on the bed and spreading his arms out. “Okay. Goodnight Technoooo.”

He drew the last syllable out in a sing-song, the way he sometimes had when they were younger, and Techno snorted as he slipped through the door.

“G’night Wil.”

Chapter End Notes

won't lie to you guys, Dream's royal outfit is definitely my favorite. it's so pretty in my head. O.O

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Theseus

Chapter Summary

This was something sacred. Even if he hadn't felt it—the way everything seemed to still around them at Wilbur's words—he could see it in Techno's eyes. Techno's eyes widened as Tommy reached forwards and ever so gently took the bow.

//

The one with cool trickshots and "family" bonding moments.

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is "[Theseus](#)" by The Oh Hellos! :D

CW: mentions of past abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fwump!

Wilbur blinked as Philza dumped a stack of books so old they looked like they were rotting on the office desk in front of him.

“What are these?”

Phil shot him a strained smile before turning back to the bookshelf behind him. “Books,” he explained, “on how to run a country.”

Wilbur frowned, eyes skipping through the titles on the spines one by one. “I don't think *Species of Mobs and Their Habitats* is going to have much information on politics, Dad.”

“You never know,” Phil replied, still thumbing through books on his shelf, “I think some of those sheep over by Niki's bakery are planning a coup on the cow field next door.”

“They just want their grass,” Wilbur said, going along with the bit. “And I don't blame them. Have you seen how green it is? That grass is haute cuisine for sheep.”

Phil laughed. He pulled another book from the shelf, slapping it down on top of the pile he'd created and pushing them all towards Wilbur. Then he bent down and pulled open his desk drawer.

Wilbur leaned forwards in his chair, watching with mild curiosity as Phil rifled through stacks of old papers and scrolls.

“What is all of this for?” he asked.

Phil didn’t pause his rummaging, simply pushing his arms further back into the drawer as he replied. “For you, while I’m gone. In case anything happens.”

Wilbur sighed. After speaking with Techno last night, he was a little more comfortable with the idea of running the kingdom without Phil. After all, he wouldn’t really be *running* it, per se. Just keeping an eye on it while Phil was away. It would only be for two weeks—two and a half at most. And Techno was right, it wasn’t like Wilbur was alone. Quackity and the rest of the royal guard would be there if anything went wrong, and a messenger could travel pretty quickly without supplies weighing them down if Wilbur needed to get in contact with Phil. He’d be fine. He could do this. Of course he could...

“Dad, I’ll be fine. It’s only two weeks, and I’ve already read most of this stuff before. You taught it to me.”

“I know, I know.” Phil pulled his hands out from the bottom drawer, carefully moving away from the desk before standing so that he didn’t hit his head. He knocked the drawer shut with his foot. “I’m just worried. You’re only eighteen, Wil, and I’m leaving you in charge of a whole kingdom. Plus there’s the vines.”

“Dream said the vines shouldn’t reach Pogtopia for another three weeks, if they reach it at all. You’re leaving tomorrow. So even if you don’t stop them, you’ll be back before they get here.”

Phil pulled out his desk chair and sat down. He turned to face Wilbur, and, for the first time, Wilbur noticed how tired he looked. His blue eyes, which used to be bright as the summer sky, were dulled. Light bags circled underneath them from one too many late nights in his office.

He needed to get out. Wilbur knew how much his father used to love to travel, but after they’d come home from the last trip to find an eleven-year-old Technoblade on their doorstep, they hadn’t really left since. It didn’t necessarily have anything to do with Techno, but they had a family here. They’d enjoyed each other’s company in Pogtopia for a few years, and then his mom got sick, and after that they hadn’t really even *considered* leaving. Phil had a kingdom to run, Wilbur had lessons to take, and Techno... Techno didn’t have the same antsy urge to explore that Phil did. He didn’t mind staying in one place.

And now there was Tommy, who wasn’t really family, but was staying here all the same. Wilbur hadn’t thought of it until now, but he supposed he would be in charge of him, too, while Phil was away.

At least he would be keeping him far—*far*—away from Dream.

“I guess that’s true,” Phil said, and it took Wilbur a second to remember they were still talking about the vines and Phil’s hesitance to leave for them.

“I know it’s true,” Wilbur said. “And besides, you need this trip. It’ll be a break for you, even if it is somewhat of a business expedition.”

Phil sighed, leaning back in his chair. Wilbur knew he was still hesitating, still worrying about leaving him behind. But he could also see a light growing in Phil's eyes, the prospect of a new adventure finally unfolding after eight years of staying in one place. Phil needed this, and Pogtopia needed someone to stop the vines. Him going would just be killing two birds with one stone.

Wilbur could suck up his own doubts and fears for a little while. Everything would be fine.

"Alright. I trust you, Wil. But if anything happens that you can't handle on your own, and I mean anything, send me a message right away."

Wilbur nodded adamantly. He would. But there shouldn't be anything too hard to handle. Phil had said it before—Pogtopia was so tiny and calm that it didn't really demand much work. The only reason Phil had been running himself ragged the past few days was because of the bloodvines. After they were gone, everything could go back to normal. Wilbur could hang out with Techno again, Tommy could... well... Wilbur wasn't sure what Tommy would do once the bloodvines were gone. He'd agreed to stay at the castle until the vines were taken care of, but what about afterwards?

A pang of hurt that Wilbur hadn't been expecting ricocheted through his chest. He liked Tommy. The kid was fun to be around, and something about his energy was infectious. Wilbur had only known him a few days, but already he'd developed a sort of protectiveness over him, and a strong bond that he wasn't sure he was ready to loosen just yet. Even Techno seemed to have warmed up to him.

Thinking of the two, Wilbur frowned.

"Hey, have you seen Tommy and Techno today?" he asked.

Phil glanced back behind him at the open window. "I think I saw them heading out to the fields earlier this morning. You weren't up yet."

"Oh—" Wilbur's chair screeched as he pushed it back and stood up. "—okay. I'm going to go meet them, but I'll be back later, okay? And—"

"Wil."

Wilbur paused, already halfway out the door. "Yeah?"

Phil's face was serious, possibly the most serious Wilbur had ever seen it. "If I'm not back, and the vines reach Pogtopia, message me right away. Then light the fields," he said quietly.

Swallowing, Wilbur nodded. Lighting the fields was their first line of defense against the vines and their army, if they came. It was up to Wilbur to command the guard and set the outer rim aflame, but then it was up to nature whether the fire spread or not. He hoped it wouldn't. If it spread, the entire field could be incinerated.

The gardens were out there. Wilbur had grown up out there.

"I will," he responded anyway.

Phil's expression softened. He cracked a small smile at Wilbur and gestured to the door. "Go on now. Make sure they aren't getting into *too* much trouble out there."

Wilbur chuckled, but even to him it sounded fake. He slipped out the door anyway, gently closing it behind him before heading off down the hall.

Phil would leave tomorrow morning, and then everything would be up to him. The weight of the kingdom would fall on his shoulders. The only question was, was he ready to carry it?

—»-»-»-»-»-—

"Stop tensing your shoulders! It makes it harder to carry the sword."

Tommy's shoulders dropped, and Techno only had a moment to nod his approval before Tommy's sword came slicing back towards his head. They'd pulled play swords from the castle armory for today, their blades coated with thick wax so that they couldn't actually cut anything. Techno had intended the offered sparring lesson as a peace offering after catching Tommy hiding from Dream yesterday evening. They had yet to mention it—both of them hesitant to bring up the topic—but Techno's offering seemed to be working nonetheless.

Techno ducked just as a swoosh of air ripped over his head. He popped back up, panting, and lunged for Tommy's chest. Tommy stepped back and twisted his torso so that Techno's sword just missed his ribs, then he swung his sword in an upward arc, knocking Techno's up and to the side. Techno used the momentum to spin, slashing his sword out towards Tommy's back. Tommy dropped to a crouch, bringing his sword up above his head just in time for Techno's to clash against it. They stayed like that for a moment, both grunting as they pushed against each other's blades.

"Come on, Theseus," Techno said through gritted teeth, "get up!"

"Ergh! I can't! You're too fuckin'... fuckin' big man!"

"Yes you can. Come on! Push up!"

Techno felt pressure build against his blade, Tommy struggling to push Techno off of him without falling from his crouched position. He managed to push Techno's blade up a few inches before letting it fall again.

"This isn't fuckin' *fair*, man. You're way taller than me," Tommy complained. Both of their arms were shaking by this point, but neither was giving up.

"Being taller doesn't matter. It just means I have certain advantages that you don't. You bein' short gives you advantages, too. You just gotta find 'em."

Tommy groaned, pushing against the blade again in a futile attempt to stand. "I'm not *short*."

“Mm, sure you’re not.”

Tommy grunted, but a second later his eyes lit up and he swiveled around on one foot. His shoulder just barely missed Techno’s blade as it came down, no longer blocked by Tommy’s sword, but he managed to pop back up to his feet, grinning wildly as Techno lifted his sword again.

“Ha ha! Bitch! Can’t keep me down for long.”

Techno rolled his eyes from behind his blade. “See, I told you bein’ short has its advantages.”

“I’m *not* short!”

Technoblade laughed at the offended look on Tommy’s face. He took a second to catch his breath, watching the way Tommy experimentally flipped his sword over and over in his hand.

The kid was almost a natural. Almost. He still stumbled and tripped over himself occasionally, still missed swings and had possibly the worst fighting posture Techno had ever seen. But, despite all that, Tommy was smart. He’d gotten the hang of the mechanics, and now could show off his quick thinking and split second strategizing. He was extremely good at blocking—often catching Techno’s blade mere milliseconds before it could collide with him. Plus, for a kid, he was pretty strong. He still couldn’t push Techno off of him, but he swung his blade with purpose and a strength that Techno begrudgingly admired. It was different from Techno’s fighting style, which was calculated and pointed. It was sloppier, messy. But even the messy swings were done with such ferocity that Techno actually had to work hard to avoid them.

The combination of Tommy’s wit and strength was what had earned him the nickname ‘Theseus’, a Greek demi-god Techno had spent a good thirty minutes explaining the origins of while they warmed up that morning. The voices had actually come up with it, all chanting it at once while they fought.

It was surprising how quickly the kid had learned. Techno wondered what had flipped his switch.

“Techno! Tommy!”

Techno turned towards the voice. His sword dropped to his side as he caught sight of Wilbur, brown hair streaked auburn in the morning sun, parting his way through the sea of yellow grass to get to them. He was wearing his crown, and it looked oddly out of place without the rest of his robes. A plain white, flowing shirt was tucked into plain brown pants, and Wilbur’s typical combat boots looked like they had been hastily pulled on, the knots all tangled at the tops. The thing that really caught Techno’s eye, though, was the bow in his hand and the bag of arrows slung over his shoulder.

“Wilbur!” Tommy called back, immediately dropping his sword in favor of running over to Techno’s brother.

Wilbur chuckled, ruffling Tommy's hair and catching eyes with Techno. "Sparring again? I think Techno's brainwashed you."

"No, it's fun!" Tommy protested. "And I almost had him before you showed up."

Techno stuck his sword into the dirt, leaning into it and smirking. "Pfft— If you call 'almost having me' crouching under my blade for the past five minutes, then sure."

Tommy didn't respond. His attention had already latched onto the bow and arrows strapped to Wilbur's side. "Whoa, you have a bow?" he asked.

Wilbur nodded. He held the bow up, showing off the gold-filled engravings that glittered in the bright sunlight.

Techno remembered when Wilbur had first gotten that bow. It'd been a birthday gift from his mother only a few months before she'd died. It was one of his most prized possessions, and the fact that he was even willing to bring it out here was a blatant show of trust towards the two of them.

"Can you actually shoot it?" Tommy asked. His hands hovered over the bow, as if unsure whether he could touch it or not.

"Yeah. Wanna go to the woods and I'll show you how it's done?"

Tommy nodded eagerly.

Wilbur trudged over to Techno, bending down to pick up Tommy's forgotten sword. He tossed it to him, and Techno caught it with practiced ease.

"Come on, Techno," Wilbur said, winking slyly, "let's go teach Tommy some more *long* distance fighting tactics, yeah?"

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

As the three wandered further into the Green Forest, following behind Wilbur and his bow, Tommy thought he'd figured out why Wilbur didn't like sparring. Who in their right mind would want to sword fight when they were so obviously better with a bow? And Wilbur was so obviously better with a bow.

Another arrow twanged from Wil's hand, sailing in a neat arc before lodging itself firmly into a tree trunk. This was the sixth arrow Wilbur had launched, and every time Tommy was just as astounded when it found its mark.

"Where next?" Wilbur asked, looking back at Tommy as he nocked another arrow.

Tommy grinned and looked around the forest for a new target.

The Green Forest really lived up to its name. Almost everywhere Tommy looked, all he saw was green: green moss coating logs and dripping from tree limbs, soft green grass crunching beneath his feet as he walked, green leaves rustling in the wind, and green bushes growing blackberries and mulberries in thick clumps.

Wilbur had led them into a different part of the forest than the part Tommy travelled through all those days ago while running from the SMP lands. This area had fewer pine trees, and more moss and greenery. Giant logs frequently blockaded their path, forcing them to either go around or climb over, which Tommy had enjoyed. Standing on top of them made him feel tall, and jumping off the other side almost felt like flying.

A twisting tree trunk caught Tommy's attention, and he pointed to it.

"Can you shoot one through that ring?" he asked, referring to the loop the trunk created.

Wilbur squinted at the twisting trunk, then raised his bow. Tommy watched him pull the string back, the tip of the arrow glinting in the sunlight for just half of a second before Wilbur released. The arrow shot forwards with speed Tommy hadn't known possible until today, sailing through the looping trunk, past a cluster of mushrooms, and not stopping until it thunked into another tree about thirty feet away.

Wilbur turned back to him with a hesitant grin. "Ha. I didn't actually know if I could make that one or not."

"Holy shit," Tommy muttered before bouncing up and down excitedly. "That was *so cool!*"

Wilbur laughed as Tommy grabbed onto his arm. "It's just practice, really. You could do it too, after a while."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Have you ever shot a bow before?"

Tommy shook his head just as Techno emerged from the brush behind them, clutching a cluster of arrows in his hands. He'd been placed in charge of gathering the ones Wilbur shot off, since most of them were too high up for Tommy to reach.

"I saw some of the castle guards use their bows in the SMP lands, but Dream never let me near weapons. He kept most of them in his office, which was totally off limits," Tommy explained quietly, so that Techno couldn't hear.

Techno hadn't asked him about yesterday evening. Tommy had expected him to mention it as soon as he'd swung open his bedroom door that morning to find Technoblade standing outside of it, fist raised to knock. But he hadn't. Instead, he'd invited Tommy out to the fields for a sparring match.

Maybe he forgot, Tommy had thought to himself as they left the castle and headed into the fields. After all, Techno certainly had more important things to think about now that he and Phil were leaving for the Badlands soon.

Wilbur had filled him in on everything last night after dropping him off at his room. He'd explained all that they'd discussed in the meeting—from Techno and Phil's departure with Dream, to Wilbur being in charge of the kingdom for a few weeks. Wil hadn't seemed stressed about it, but it certainly sounded stressful to Tommy. He wouldn't be surprised if that was the reason why Techno hadn't asked about his venture in the cabinet yesterday.

Wilbur frowned. "Oh. Well... would you like to try?" he asked, raising his bow and holding it out.

Immediately, Tommy forgot all about Technoblade and Dream.

This was something sacred. Even if he hadn't felt it—the way everything seemed to still around them at Wilbur's words—he could see it in Techno's eyes. Techno's eyes widened as Tommy reached forwards and ever so gently took the bow.

The wood was smooth in his hands. He shifted it, taking in the way the gold bits glittered in the light filtering through the trees. Just above the center of the handle, where a strip of soft fabric had been tied to make holding it easier, two little initials had been carved: *W.W.* Wilbur Watson.

"Alright," Wilbur said once the bow had been safely transferred, "how about we aim for... that tree there. You see it?"

Tommy nodded. It was impossible *not* to see the tree Wilbur had pointed to; it was only about ten feet in front of them, and had a massive trunk covered in neon green moss.

"Okay." Wilbur stepped behind him. "First you're going to want to nock an arrow. Put this bit against the string, keeping that feather there pointed towards you."

Tommy fumbled with the arrow he'd been handed, trying to get the back to line up with the string without it slipping off. It was surprisingly difficult. Even with a notch carved into the arrow to make it easier, Tommy still struggled to get it fitted. After several moments of fighting it, Wilbur stepped in to help. He nudged Tommy's left arm higher, tilting the bow up with it.

"Here, try nocking it with it pointed like this versus straight down at the ground. As soon as you get it lined up, raise your left arm and pull back with the right. Keep your right elbow up."

Tommy did as he was told, fiddling around with the arrow until it fit against the string, then pulling back. The string was stretchy in his hands, but just taut enough that it took effort to pull back.

"Good," Wilbur said, placing a finger against Tommy's arrow to hold it in place against the bow. He hadn't realized it had started to veer off to the side. "Now rest the arrow on your finger, like that. Yeah."

Tommy adjusted his grip accordingly.

“The arrow’s a bit finicky, so make sure you keep it in place. You can tilt the bow a little for now to help. Then—” Wilbur moved to Tommy’s back arm, lightly pushing his elbow up. “—you want to touch your hand to your jaw here, really lightly. Keep your feet parted. Now aim and let go.”

Tommy drew back further, letting his knuckle just barely graze his face as he aimed at the tree, inhaled, and let go.

“Pfft—”

Tommy frowned as the arrow dropped to the ground just in front of him, having shot only a few measly inches forward. Techno’s snort turned into full-out laughter behind him, while Wilbur just bent down to grab the arrow.

“Don’t worry, I did the same thing my first time. Archery’s harder than it looks,” he explained, handing him the arrow again. “You want to stay completely still when you shoot. Even once you’ve let go, don’t move to follow it.”

Tommy nodded, shooting a glare over his shoulder at Techno before returning to the bow. He followed the steps Wilbur had led him through again—nocking the arrow, raising the bow, pulling his elbow back, touching his chin—then aimed and released.

This time, the arrow flew a good few feet forwards. Still nowhere near the spot he’d been aiming for, but closer. It skittered across the ground, rolling to a stop just below the tree trunk.

“Better,” Wilbur said with a smile. “A few more tries, and you’ll get it.”

“How come you make it look so easy?” Tommy asked as Wilbur went to retrieve the arrow.

Wilbur shrugged. He grabbed onto the tree limb above him, hoisting himself up and into the tree. Once he’d situated himself on the branch, he held out his hand to Tommy for the bow. Tommy handed it over, and Wilbur wrapped his legs around the branch before swinging upside down, still holding the bow. His crown tumbled off into the grass below, but Wilbur didn’t seem to care nor notice as he hooked his legs together and let go of the branch.

Tommy laughed. “What are you—?”

Wilbur nocked his bow upside down, then raised it, taking careful aim at the looped trunk again. He pulled back an inch further, fingers just brushing his cheek, then let go.

Thunk!

The arrow collided with wood, missing the open circle completely as it lodged into the trunk. Still, it was close, and a better shot than Tommy could ever dream of pulling off.

“Alright Wil, no need to show off,” Techno said, but a corner of his mouth quirked upwards.

Tommy looked back just as Wilbur swung down from the tree. The older boy bent to scoop his crown from the grass, but instead of placing it back on his head he kept it in his hand,

trodding back over to Tommy and Techno.

“That was... that was *pog*,” Tommy said once Wilbur stood in front of him. “How do you do it?”

Wilbur chuckled, glancing back at the arrow still firmly lodged in the tree. “I didn’t even make it, Tommy.”

“That was still pog! Come on! Teach me! I wanna learn!”

Techno laughed, stepping closer to playfully knock his arm against Tommy’s shoulder. “Might want to learn how to shoot standing up first, Theseus.”

Tommy pouted, but Techno and Wilbur were already walking away—heading deeper into the forest. He stumbled after them.

“What’d you get the name Theseus from, anyway?” Wilbur asked as Tommy fell into step between the two brothers.

He glanced up at Techno, who sighed.

“It was the voices’ idea, but it fits, doesn’t it?”

“Voices?” Tommy piped up. “What voices?”

“Ahh...”

Wilbur ran a hand through his hair, chuckling. “Yeah, good luck explaining that one Techno.”

The three of them stepped up and over a fallen log, carefully picking and choosing their way through the underbrush. Further ahead, Tommy could hear a stream gurgling.

“I... I mean,” Techno stammered, swishing his long braid over his shoulder, “they’re not that big a deal. Just voices. I hear them in my head sometimes, but not very often anymore.”

Maybe Tommy’s first question should have been something more serious. Maybe he should have realized that Technoblade was far from stupid, and the voices in his head of course weren’t his own. Instead, he stepped over a stone and asked, “Isn’t that just called thinking?”

Wilbur burst out laughing, and even Techno chuckled—glancing down at him.

“No, Theseus. They’re not my voice, and there’s multiple. I don’t know who they are, but I’ve had them for a while. Since I was a kid, like you.”

“Hey! I am *not* a kid.” Tommy scowled.

“Really? I don’t think I’ve ever seen an adult who could fit into a tiny cabinet like you did—”

Tommy immediately fell silent, but Technoblade didn’t seem to notice. He continued, “—yesterday. Not judgin’ you, though. Dream’s a weird dude, and the fact that he—”

Techno's ramble stopped short as Wilbur shot him a pointed glare, but it didn't matter. Tommy was already staring at him.

"What do you know?" Tommy asked, panic tightening its grip around his chest.

Techno fumbled over the next log, scratching the back of his head and glancing again at Wil. "Ahhhh... nothing?"

"Bullshit." Tommy didn't follow him over the log, standing on the other side and crossing his arms over his chest. "Wilbur told you, didn't he?"

"Tommy, I'm sorry," Wil interrupted. He stepped in front of Techno, pulling Tommy's attention away from the older boy. "But he asked. And listen, when Phil and Dream go to the Badlands together, someone needs to make sure Phil doesn't accidentally out you. Technoblade can do that. That is, unless you want to tell Phil now?"

Tommy hesitated only a moment before shaking his head. It wasn't that he didn't trust Phil, it was just that he didn't *totally* trust Phil. Wilbur had said it himself the first time Tommy talked to him: Phil made the rules here. He was king. Kings had to be responsible, and follow the rules. And those rules probably included returning Tommy to his proper guardian.

He should have left. He shouldn't have stayed here, in the castle, with the one person who was obligated to send Tommy back.

Tommy took a step back, and Wilbur must have seen the panic in his face, because he immediately softened.

"You don't have to tell him, and we won't tell anyone else if you don't want us to. I wouldn't have told Techno if he hadn't already seen you hiding and asked. But you should think about it. Phil would never let Dream get away with what he did to you. He'd get in trouble."

Tommy nodded, but inside his head he knew he could never tell Phil. One, because Phil could send him back. And two, because Tommy wasn't exactly sure he *wanted* Dream to get in trouble.

Despite what he'd done, and how awful he was, Dream had also been the one to give Tommy a home for the past eight years of his life. He'd thrown Tommy a birthday party once, inviting all the Palace Guard to attend. He'd taught Tommy how to fish in the river outside when he was ten. He'd given him hugs after nightmares, and brought him breakfast-in-bed when he was sick.

Dream wasn't a bad guy all the time. And, really, he'd only hurt Tommy when he deserved it. Tommy just hadn't been able to handle it anymore, and had run away.

Should he have stayed? Dream cared about him. Dream loved him.

Dream hadn't asked about him yesterday.

Maybe he just didn't expect Tommy to have gone through Pogtopia. Maybe he thought he'd gone the other direction, towards the Badlands and the Nether.

Why wasn't he looking for him, then?

Maybe he was in denial that Tommy had left.

Wilbur had said that people who cared about you didn't purposefully hurt you.

But Dream was just punishing him for doing something bad. All parents did that, didn't they?

"Come on, Tommy." Wilbur's voice snapped Tommy from his thoughts. He extended his hand over the log for Tommy to take. "Let's go this way. There's a path just past the river that we can take back to the castle."

Tommy took the offered hand and stepped over the log. "Okay."

All his thoughts about Dream were confusing. He didn't want to think about it anymore. He was in Pogtopia now, in a forest, and Dream didn't know he was here. And for now that was okay.

"I really am sorry," Wilbur said as they trudged forwards.

Tommy shook his head. He could see the river now; the rushing water bubbling and flowing over smooth stones just ahead of them.

"It's fine," he said, glancing at Techno, who looked oddly remorseful as well. "Techno told me about his voices, after all. So it's even."

Techno gave him a hesitant smile, and Tommy smiled back, feeling the smallest bit of tension drain from his chest.

He wasn't sure how he felt about Dream, but maybe that was okay. Here, under the canopy of trees with Wilbur and Techno, he felt safe. And maybe that was enough.

—>>->>->>->>->>—

Dinner that night was cooked and served quickly by Techno. Usually Phil would have made dinner, but Techno had been adamant that he focus on packing for tomorrow morning instead. Phil had argued that Techno also needed to pack, and that maybe they should just get Wilbur to cook, but Techno had brushed it aside with a quip about how Wilbur's cooking tended to catch on fire, and the last thing they needed on their hands was a burning castle.

Phil used his fork to pick at his piece of pulled pork. Everything on his plate was going cold, but he couldn't find it in himself to eat. There was nothing wrong with the food, it looked delicious. He just wasn't hungry.

He was nervous. It had been a while since he'd last been nervous about something. The last time he could remember feeling nervous was at Kristin's funeral, and even then the feeling

had been mostly overwhelmed by grief.

Back then, he'd been nervous about running his family without her at his side. He wasn't sure he could do it. He wasn't that great of a father, surely, and he had a kingdom to run on top of taking care of the kids. Now, he was nervous about Wilbur running the country without *him* at his side.

Also, he was a little worried about the bloodvines.

They were dangerous, and their army even more so. If Phil touched a vine, he could be corrupted. If he didn't, the vines' possessed army would attack him. It was a lose-lose situation.

Hopefully, the spot Dream was taking him to would be void of any other people, though. Dream had explained that the roots stemmed from inside an underground castle on the edge of the Badlands, close to the Nether. No one lived out there, and the SMP's guards hadn't seen any army members when they'd gone to investigate it, so Dream guessed that they shouldn't have to fight anyone to get inside.

Phil wasn't sure if he should feel reassured by that or not. If the army wasn't there, then they were following the vines wherever they went. Right now, that meant they were headed towards Pogtopia.

"Tommy, if you launch that pea at me I swear to prime."

Phil blinked, refocusing on the table in front of him. He sat at the head. To his right was Techno, and Wil sat on his left. Tommy had taken the seat next to Wilbur before, but now he sat beside Techno, facing off Wilbur with a pea placed tactically in the center of his spoon.

"You did it first," Tommy replied. "Besides, I'm just practicing my aim."

Wilbur snickered, shooting two more peas across the table towards Tommy. One landed on his plate, while the other fell just short. Tommy scrambled to collect them while Wil reloaded.

"Wilbur, eat your peas please," Phil sighed. He rested his fork against the edge of his plate, giving up on eating. "I never thought that, at eighteen, I'd still have to tell you to eat your vegetables."

Wilbur smiled, but let the peas roll off of his spoon and back onto his plate. Noticeably, he hadn't eaten much either.

Technoblade and Tommy, on the other hand, had practically wolfed through their meals.

"Techno, how come you never told me you could cook?" Tommy asked.

Techno shrugged, spearing four peas—one on each of his fork's prongs—and raising them to his mouth. "I've only known you for like... a couple a' days. Besides, it's just cookin'."

"Yeah, but this cooking is *poggers*."

”Don’t get used to it. When Phil and I leave tomorrow, you’ll have to pray Wilbur can get Quackity or one of the other guards to cook for him. Otherwise you’ll be eatin’ burnt grilled cheese for every meal.”

“Hey!” Wilbur launched another pea across the table, hitting Technoblade right in the chest. “I can cook other things besides grilled cheese.”

“Without turning them to soot?”

“Well...”

Phil shook his head with a chuckle, cutting off the conversation before it could really get heated. “Don’t worry. I left sandwich making materials in the cellar, and Niki from town has agreed to drop off food every once in a while. You’ll survive.”

Wilbur sank lower in his seat, pouting, but Phil knew he wasn’t really mad. He’d accepted his fate as a bad cook long ago.

“Speaking of us leaving tomorrow,” Phil said, changing the subject, “I asked Quackity to prepare Carl for you.” He nodded at Technoblade.

“Who’s Carl?” Tommy asked.

“My horse. He’s one of the fastest.”

“You have a horse?”

“Of course.”

“Right, also, Wil. I left supplies to write messages on my desk in the office,” Phil said, turning to his biological son. “If you need anything, and I mean anything, write me right away.”

Wilbur nodded. He twirled his spoon around in his peas, scattering them across his plate. “What time are you leaving tomorrow?” he asked.

Phil sighed, sitting back in his chair. “Early, I think. Dream is coming to help us pack up, and as soon as everything is strapped up we’re leaving.”

The whole dining room table fell silent.

Phil frowned as Techno looked down at his pulled pork, Wilbur scratched the back of his neck, and Tommy averted his eyes to stare down at his lap. Had he said something?

Maybe everyone was just nervous. Phil could certainly understand that feeling.

“What time should I be up?” Wilbur finally asked, breaking the strange tension that had fallen over the whole room.

“If you could be up at seven, that would be great.”

“Okay.” Wilbur pushed back from the table. “Do you mind if I go now, then?”

Phil shook his head, and Wilbur picked up his plate and left to go bring it to the kitchen. Techno stood next, muttering something about still needing to pack. Then it was just Phil and Tommy.

The younger boy was still staring down at his lap, peas forgotten in front of him. He’d eaten everything on his plate besides them.

“Want me to take your plate, mate?” Phil asked, not really sure how to proceed.

Tommy was so loud and excitable around Wilbur. He’d even started to loosen up around Technoblade recently—laughing louder and cracking jokes at him. But around Phil he was always so quiet. Phil didn’t understand why.

Tommy glanced up, wide blue eyes catching on Phil’s before he shook his head. “I can do it. Don’t worry.”

He made to stand up with his plate, but his hands were shaking and he nearly dropped it. Phil hurried to catch it before it could fall, grabbing onto Tommy’s wrist to keep them both steady.

“Whoa, mate. Are you—?”

To his surprise, the moment Phil latched onto Tommy’s wrist, he flinched backwards so violently that Phil almost dropped the plate again. Phil quickly let go, allowing Tommy to pull his hands into himself.

“Sorry! Sorry,” Tommy hurried to apologize. He stumbled back a few steps, eyes wide and terrified. “Sorry.”

“No, no. It’s okay. Are you okay?”

Tommy glanced towards the doors, the ones Techno and Wilbur had disappeared through just minutes ago, then back at Phil. Some of the original terror had left his eyes, but his hands were still shaking.

Something was wrong. Something was *very* wrong, but Phil couldn’t figure out what.

“No. No, I’m fine,” Tommy said, blowing out a breath and holding out his hands for the plate. “Just jumpy today, I guess. I can take that.”

“You sure?” Phil asked, glancing once again at Tommy’s shaking palms.

Tommy didn’t seem to notice them. He bobbed his head, golden curls bouncing. “Yes.”

A bit hesitantly, Phil handed him the plate. Once he was sure Tommy had it, he grabbed his own plate from the table and steered them towards the kitchen doors.

Wilbur and Techno were already gone, their plates empty and drying on the rack beside the sink. Phil dumped his food into the bin, then twisted the faucet to get the water flowing. He

took a sponge from the shelf above, then took Tommy's plate from him and placed it in the sink with his own. Tommy watched beside him, utterly still and utterly silent.

Something was up with him, but if he didn't want to say anything, then Phil wouldn't push him.

"So," Phil said, beginning to scrub, "what did you and Techno do outside this morning? I saw you two leaving."

"Oh, uh, Techno was teaching me how to spar."

Phil chuckled. "Typical Technoblade. You know that when he first came here, the only thing he'd brought with him was a wooden sword he'd made himself?"

Tommy shook his head, watching as soap bubbles rolled down into the drain.

Phil smiled, scrubbing harder at the edges of Tommy's plate. "Yeah. No food, no water, nothing but that sword. It was a tiny thing, too. I couldn't believe he'd walked all the way from the Nether with only that, but I guess the Green Forest has a pretty good supply of berries and water."

Tommy nodded. "We went out there today," he said. "Wilbur was showing me how he shoots his bow."

His bow? The one Kristin had gotten for him?

"The gold one?" Phil asked, curious.

"Yeah."

Phil handed Tommy his plate, gesturing towards the towel by Wil and Techno's plates. Tommy picked it up and dutifully began to dry the plate he'd been handed.

Phil was surprised Wilbur had brought his bow out around someone who wasn't family. It was the last gift his mother gave him. He didn't like using it with just anyone.

Phil glanced over at Tommy again. His eyes were narrowed in concentration as he dried the plate, tongue poking out slightly as he worked. He was much tanner than he'd been when he first arrived. He'd been outside a lot—with Techno, with Wil—and the dark freckles that dotted his cheeks and nose showed it.

Along with those, there were some slightly darker patches of skin scattered across Tommy's arms.

Phil frowned. Had those patches always been there? What had Tommy been wearing to get a weird tan like that?

"Wilbur's pretty good with a bow, from what I remember. He hasn't practiced with me in a while, though."

“Oh yeah. He did this super pog trick today where he hung upside down from a tree branch and shot the arrow. It was *so cool*,” Tommy quickly rambled, the words falling from his mouth almost as quickly as water from the faucet.

“What does ‘pog’ mean?” Phil asked, handing Tommy the second dish and turning off the faucet. “I heard you say something like that at dinner, too. Is it some kind of slang I’m too old to know about?”

To Phil’s relief, the joke landed. Tommy giggled, bright eyes turning to look up at him.

“You are quite old, but no. It’s like... Okay, Pogtopia is just the fuckin’ *weirdest* name for a country, right? And I was telling Wilbur, ‘why would you put a pog in front of topia?’ It just doesn’t make sense because it doesn’t *mean* anything!” Tommy rambled, eyes glittering. “And then I thought, you know, ‘pog’ could be a pretty cool word. And it basically just means ‘cool’. So then ‘Pogtopia’ makes sense, because it would really be ‘Cooltopia’. And I think Pogtopia is pretty cool... so...” Tommy trailed off, looking away and picking at a small scab on the back of his hand. He shrugged. “That’s all.”

Phil stared down at the boy in front of him, stunned. He felt slightly like he’d just gotten whiplash from watching Tommy get so animated before retreating right back into his shell, but it was a good whiplash. It was a whiplash Phil wanted to experience again, because the boy he’d just seen was *Tommy*. The Tommy who’d made Wilbur laugh again, and the Tommy who had somehow gotten on Techno’s good side after having the latter distrust him for days after his arrival.

Slowly, a smile stretched across Phil’s face.

“Tommy, that is very pog.”

Immediately, Tommy’s eyes lit up again. “You’ve got it,” he said, quieter than before, but with a huge grin splitting across his face.

They left the kitchen soon after, and Phil wished Tommy a good night before they parted ways for their separate bedrooms.

As Phil got ready for bed, he smiled to himself. Tommy was a good kid. He was glad Wilbur had decided to offer him a room here until the vines were taken care of. Of course, he still wondered where he’d come from. Had he been living out in the woods all on his own? Somewhere between the Badlands and the SMP, maybe, since he’d known about the bloodvines and came to warn them before even Dream could? He’d said he had no family. Did he live with anyone? Surely not, or else why would he have agreed to stay here?

Phil glanced up at the picture above his bed. It was a picture of him and Kristin on their wedding day—both their faces smiling, almost glowing, riding the high of finally being married to each other. She’d been the one to convince him to take Technoblade in, all those years ago. He wondered how she’d feel about Tommy.

He wondered how she’d feel about the bloodvines. What would she suggest he do? What would she say about his dream? Would she think that leaving Wilbur in charge of the

kingdom was a good idea? She'd always held unwavering faith in the capabilities of Phil. He didn't doubt she'd feel the same about Wil, but it was hard for Phil to feel that same optimism. He trusted his son, but he didn't want something to go wrong and for him to get hurt.

Phil looked down at his hand. He'd been subconsciously fiddling with his wedding ring, and a bright red, round mark marred the bottom of his ring finger.

He sighed, pushing the ring back into place and plopping down on his bed.

He was still nervous. He still wasn't sure if he was making the right decisions. But he had to trust that everything would turn out fine. They would go tomorrow, and Wilbur would be fine, and Phil would be fine, and everything would turn out fine.

By the time Phil fell asleep, the odd moment he'd had with Tommy in the dining room was long forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

hey guys! I am posting this with minimal proof-reading, so if you catch any typos let me know. also, the italics extra space thing is a pain and I wish it a very die.

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Dream

Chapter Summary

Darkness enveloped the trees like tar, slowly sinking the tall pines and shorter oak. All the creatures of the forest had fallen silent long ago, and now the only sound was the occasional rush of wind through the leaves. In Pogtopia, the torches that lined the village streets flickered. There was no one there to see them.

Everything stilled. Everything held its breath. Everything waited.

//

Philza, Dream, and Techno leave for the Badlands.

Chapter Notes

Song for this chapter is "[Dream](#)" by Imagine Dragons.

CW: mention of blood (in a metaphor), and death. (all of that is only in the first scene).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Green Forest was deathly silent.

Darkness enveloped the trees like tar, slowly sinking the tall pines and shorter oak. All the creatures of the forest had fallen silent long ago, and now the only sound was the occasional rush of wind through the leaves. In Pogtopia, the torches that lined the village streets flickered. There was no one there to see them.

Everything stilled. Everything held its breath. Everything waited.

The first vine emerged from the forest like a snake from its den—hissing as it wove its way through the tall grass. It didn't take long for more to follow it. Like trails of blood, they trickled across the field.

The vine made contact with someone's ankle first, wrapping around it before continuing to move. It crossed over a body next, pale and lying in the dirt—dead. Or, if not dead, very close to it. It wrapped around the castle gates and climbed upwards, heading towards the gilded towers. It broke them. They crumbled under the vines' weight as the sun rose on the horizon.

People were running. People were screaming. Multiple people were shooting arrows, but they weren't quick enough. The vines kept coming, and along with them, their army.

The edges of the field were on fire. Bright orange flames flickered and danced, licking like forked-tongues at the open air. The sky was dark. Was it going to rain? Or was it already raining?

Philza saw it all with a birds eye view. He saw the vines, the fields, the darkening sky and the shadows slowly creeping closer and closer through the woods.

He was a bird. But soon enough this snake was going to lash out and bite him.

Tears leaked from his eyes. He should do something. He should be *doing* something, but he couldn't move and the vines were getting closer and the screaming was getting louder and—

Phil shot up in bed.

Panting and dripping with sweat, he gave himself a minute to catch his bearings before turning to look out the window. There was a bird there, a black crow perched on the window sill outside. It cocked its head at Phil and gave a quick caw, almost as if it was telling him good morning, then flew off. In its absence, there was Pogtopia, glimmering and glistening as always. The sun peeked out from behind the forest, cascading brilliant yellow light across the village rooftops. Pink skies were slowly fading to blue, and not a cloud was in sight. It was a nice day. A perfect day for traveling.

Phil swung his legs out of bed. Dream would be coming soon. He needed to get dressed and ready so they could leave for the bloodvines as soon as possible.

It didn't matter if this dream he kept having was prophecy or not. King Philza Watson would not let it come true.

—»-»-»-»-»-—

Tommy hid in a guest room while the horses were packed, and watched through the window when Dream arrived. He was riding Spirit, the same caramel colored horse he'd always traveled around the SMP on. Like last time, George and Sapnap were both with him. But now they too had their own horses, although theirs were attached to carts piled high with something covered in white tarp.

Wilbur had come to see him that morning before leaving to help Phil pack. He'd promised Tommy that Dream wouldn't find him—that Dream didn't even know he was here—and told him he'd come back to check on him as soon as Phil and Techno left. Tommy was grateful for it, because the knowledge that Wil was coming back was really the only thing keeping him from completely losing it.

His knees were starting to hurt from kneeling beside the bedroom window. He rocked back onto his toes, keeping a firm grip on the edge of the window sill so he wouldn't fall. From between the criss-crossed framing, he could see the castle's front yard.

Rose bushes sprung up around the gates, which had been left open for Philza and Dream. Tommy could see both of them, now—Dream sitting up on his horse while Phil was just about to mount his. Technoblade stood beside Phil, his hands gripping the reigns of another, pale white horse. Carl, Tommy assumed. And beside Carl was Wilbur, arms crossed, and pointedly keeping his back to Tommy's window.

Tommy nervously drummed his fingers against the window sill. How much longer could they stand there? They'd been packing up for nearly twenty minutes now—he could hear the clock on the wall ticking from across the room.

Frustrated, he was just about to push away and stand up when Dream looked up at his window.

Tommy ducked, fingers scraping against the wall as he hid himself below the window sill. Shit. Fuck. No. Dream hadn't seen him. There was no way. He was too far away, and the castle windows were old and worn by the sun. From the outside, Tommy knew it was incredibly difficult to see in. Dream couldn't have seen him. He was just being paranoid. Right?

He waited another ten minutes before poking his head back up. Sure enough, Dream wasn't looking anymore. He seemed to be talking to Wilbur, and neither of them looked tense, so Tommy figured it couldn't be about him. Dream hadn't seen him.

Thank prime.

It felt like forever before they finally started moving. Dream led the way, and gestured for George and Sapnap to follow behind Phil. Techno, as always, stayed right beside Phil. He turned to wave at Wilbur before the gates closed, and for just a fraction of a second, Tommy swore he looked towards him, too. But then the gates closed, and by the time Tommy caught sight of Techno again he'd turned his face away.

Wilbur waited until the little party disappeared over the hills before turning back towards the castle. He kept his head high as he walked back to the doors below, and Tommy followed the top of his glittering crown until he disappeared under the stone awning.

Huh. Wilbur was officially in charge of Pogtopia now, wasn't he?

Tommy wondered how that felt. He wondered if Wilbur was nervous. Pogtopia was a quiet kingdom, but if anything went wrong, it was up to Wilbur to fix it. He could be stressing out right now, panicking like Tommy had back in that cabinet. He could lock himself up in Phil's office under the weight of it all, refuse to let Tommy in to distract him, just like Dream had done.

Instead, the bedroom door swung open to reveal Wilbur standing right outside.

"They're gone," he said.

Tommy nodded.

“I know.”

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Techno kept his grip light on Carl’s reigns as they trod deeper into the Green Forest. He knew from experience that it would take a couple days to get through the thick foliage, but he was glad for the shade. Summers in Pogtopia were brutal, but summers in the Badlands were even worse. Techno would know; the Nether bordered it.

“These tree roots are fucking awful,” Ssnap complained from behind Techno. Both he and George were lagging slightly behind, their horses tugging carts filled with heavy TNT and other supplies.

Techno had finally managed to learn their names, at least. Ssnap was the slightly taller one, with shaggy black hair held back by a bandana, and brown eyes. The other knight was George—with multicolored eyes, one blue and one brown, and dark brown hair that reminded Techno vaguely of the color of pine tree bark.

Maybe he’d been in the forest for too long already...

Ssnap’s cart bounced over another root, and Dream looked back over his shoulder.

“I’d take the straighter path, but if we want to avoid the vines as we get closer this is the way we need to go,” he explained. “This way, the army won’t ambush us.”

Ssnap grumbled to himself, but otherwise didn’t argue. After a minute, he went back to conversing with George.

Techno turned his attention to Phil and Dream.

“Will it take us any longer to get there going this way?” Phil asked.

Dream shrugged, sunlight flickering over his blond hair and moss green cloak in speckled patterns. “It shouldn’t. We might stay in the forest an extra night than it would take otherwise, but once we get out it’s a straight path to the Badlands.”

Phil nodded. Both he and Dream weren’t wearing royal robes anymore. They’d abandoned the formality in favor of comfortable traveling clothes. Phil had even brought a hat—white with green stripes—which he currently wore.

“Don’t worry,” Dream continued, a tiny smirk tugging the corners of his mouth upwards, “you’ll be back with Wilbur before you know it.”

Phil didn’t respond, only humming to himself before looking away.

Techno inhaled, soaking up the scent of fresh greenery and remnants of pine. They were traveling southeast, according to his internal compass, and the further south they traveled the less they'd smell the pine trees. He remembered this from when he'd come to Pogtopia from the Nether. As he'd gotten closer and closer, the scent of pine had grown sweeter and sweeter until it was almost overwhelming.

"It's a bit downhill here, so be careful with the supplies," Dream warned.

As they started sloping down into the woods, Techno glanced back towards Pogtopia. Through the trees, it was impossible to spot the castle, but he knew it was there. Wilbur was there—possibly still seething in the front yard. He'd put on a good face when Dream arrived, but Techno knew Wil well enough to have been able to sense his tension. Tommy was there—hiding out in one of the rooms upstairs. Techno wasn't quite sure which one, but he'd given them all a good glance as he left, hoping Tommy would see and take the look as encouragement.

They'd be fine. They'd all be fine.

Techno would make sure of it.

Chapter End Notes

ayup and good morning/afternoon/evening/night (depending on where you are in the world)! thanks for the support here recently! I really appreciate it!!

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Blackbird

Chapter Summary

He was experimenting, really. He wasn't sure if the contraption would actually work or not, but over the past couple days of traveling he'd had a lot of time to think, and this was one of the ideas his brain had come up with and then refused to drop. It hadn't helped that he found feathers literally everywhere he went. Under his horse's feet while they traveled, stuck in his hair after a particularly windy day—even now, Phil could see a dark black feather floating down the stream. It was like nature was telling him to make this.

//

Ah yes, Crime Boys fluff and Emerald Duo sarcasm. My two favorite genres :]

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is "[Blackbird](#)" by The Beatles.

This is the chapter I miscounted and had to scrounge the internet for a song for, oops.

xD

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After checking on Tommy, the first thing Wilbur did as part-time ruler of Pogtopia was grab an apple and peanut butter from the kitchen. The second, more important thing he did was call Quackity into Phil's office for a quick meeting.

"You called?" Quackity said, leaving the office door open a crack as he slipped inside.

Wilbur nodded, hurrying to chew the chunk of apple still in his mouth. Word certainly traveled quickly through the castle. He'd only *just* told another of the guards to find Quackity for him.

"Yeah, sorry. I just wanted to discuss the vines with you quickly."

Wilbur gestured towards the seat across from his own, and Quackity slid into it.

It was weird to sit in his father's chair. He'd done it before, of course—Phil didn't mind any of them sitting in his spot. But something about sitting there now, without Phil in the room, made Wilbur feel very out of place. Like he'd put on shoes that were just a tad too big.

“What about them? We’ve already got the arrows set up in the guard towers in case Phil’s expedition... mission... whatever you wanna call it doesn’t work out.”

“I know. I was just thinking... Do you think it would be a good idea to also patrol the forest a bit? Just every once in a while? I don’t think it’s all that important, but...” Wilbur rolled off, glancing down at the papers spread across Phil’s—his—desk. The paper and ink Phil had left for him, for sending letters, was right in the center. Beside it, peeking out from under a book, were the same trade route papers Phil had been working through the night Tommy arrived. The ones from Snowchester.

Had he never finished them? Phil hadn’t left much for Wilbur to do, but maybe he could do this for him while he was gone.

“Would it bring you some peace of mind to have a guard go out?” Quackity asked, sitting back in his chair.

Hesitantly, Wilbur nodded.

“Then it’s important.”

Wilbur sighed, sinking down in Phil’s chair. “Thanks, Quackity,” he said, cracking a small smile.

“Hey man, no problem,” Quackity replied with a splitting grin. “Or should I say ‘Your Highness’?”

Wilbur’s smile spread wider.

Quackity was the castle’s top guard. He’d originally been hired as a stable boy, years ago, when he and Wilbur were both barely thirteen. But he quickly moved up through the ranks because of his quick wit and skill with weaponry. Wilbur had literally grown up with him, though, and thus they had a tight bond that most princes and guards didn’t. Quackity called him ‘Your Highness’ to be formal around Phil, but when it was just the two of them alone, formalities were usually forgotten.

“I mean, if you want to be all formal about it...” Wilbur joked.

The two laughed, and Quackity reached across the desk to place a hand on Wil’s shoulder.

“Seriously, Wilbur. You’re in charge now. Anything you say— *within reason* —goes.”

Wilbur chuckled, grateful for his friend’s understanding. “Okay, I’ve got it. So... patrol around the borders?”

Quackity nodded. “Sounds good. I’ll relay it to the rest of the guard. You—”

The rest of whatever Quackity had been about to say was cut off by the office door squeaking open. Wilbur looked up just in time to see Tommy peek in, one foot through the door and one outside of it. His blue eyes were wide, latching first onto Quackity, and then sliding over to Wil.

“Uh... I can come back later,” he said, letting go of the door handle and beginning to slip back outside.

“No, no. I was just about to leave,” Quackity said, hurrying to stand. He caught Wilbur’s eye, nodding, before slipping through the door and past Tommy, who stepped back to let him pass.

“See ya, kiddo. See ya, Wil,” Quackity said, ruffling Tommy’s hair as he left. Once he’d disappeared down the hallway, Tommy turned back to the office.

“Erm, sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“Don’t worry, we were done anyway. You weren’t interrupting. What’s going on?”

Wilbur carefully tugged Snowchester’s trade agreement out from under Phil’s book. He just had to sign it, right? He’d learned how the trade industry worked a while ago, but Phil had never actually shown him one of the agreement forms and taught him how to complete it. Mostly because Pogtopia didn’t trade often. They’d never had strong enough ties with the SMP lands to trade with them, and the other kingdoms—the Badlands, the Nether—didn’t have much that Pogtopia couldn’t produce for itself.

Tommy’s feet shuffled against the hallway carpet. “I was just... I was just bored.”

“You can hang out with me, if you’d like. I’ll only be doing this for a little bit, so if you want to sit here and read or something—” Wilbur blindly gestured towards the bookshelf, still trying to read the scrawling print on Snowchester’s agreement. “—I don’t mind.”

“I can come inside?”

Wilbur looked up, and only then did he realize Tommy still hadn’t crossed through the doorway. He stood just outside, with one hand on the doorknob and the other clutching a fistful of his shirt.

“Y-yeah. Of course you can.” Wilbur frowned. *Why on earth wouldn’t he be allowed inside? It was just the office...?*

The door clicked closed behind Tommy as he stepped inside. His eyes darted from the bookshelf to the window, to the desk, to the oil lamp hanging from the spired ceiling, before finally landing on Wilbur and the empty chair in front of him. Wilbur gestured to it.

“Go on, come sit. I’ll find you a book.”

Slowly, Tommy slid across the wood floor and sat down. Wilbur stood and grabbed a book off the shelves.

“Catch,” he said before tossing Tommy the book he’d chosen.

Tommy scrambled to catch it as Wilbur sat back down.

“Um... what is it?” Tommy asked, flipping the book to its cover.

“A book,” Wilbur chuckled. “Read it and you’ll find out.”

He flipped the trade agreement over, attempting to read the second page. Had King Tubbo written this himself? The handwriting was atrocious, though Wilbur supposed his probably wasn’t much better.

“Wil I... uh... I can’t read.”

Wilbur paused. He looked up to find Tommy staring back at him, the kid’s face completely pink.

“Dream never really taught me how,” Tommy explained, glancing down at the book in his hands. “I can read *some* words, and I’ve gotten better at figuring others out, but...” He shrugged as if it was no big deal, but his cheeks were still bright red. “I can’t actually, um, read this.”

Silence, the kind that pins could be heard dropping in, fell over the room. Wilbur didn’t know how long he sat there, staring, but it was long enough for Tommy’s face to redden even further, and then for his eyes to narrow.

Tommy set the book down to cross his arms over his chest. “Hey! Stop looking at me like that. Tons of people can’t read. I’m not the only one.”

“Dream never taught you to *read*?”

Tommy shook his head. “No. Now stop looking at me all—” He gestured up and down at Wilbur’s face. “—*pityingly*. I’m not stupid.”

Wilbur sat back, completely abandoning the trade agreement. “I never said you were stupid.”

“You don’t have to. I can see it in your stupid fuckin’ face.”

“*Tommy*.”

Tommy immediately froze, gaze latching onto Wilbur’s. “What?”

Wilbur looked down at the book Tommy had placed on the desk. Yellowed pages were falling out of it, and the red binding was ripped and battered from years of use. It had been one of Wilbur’s favorite books when he was younger—one that Phil used to read to him, and then Techno once Wil forced him to. He’d taught Techno some of the harder words in it, since Techno had spoken more Piglin than English when he’d first arrived here. There was no doubt in his mind that he could teach the easier words, too.

“Do you want to learn how to read?” Wilbur asked.

For a moment, he was certain Tommy would say no. Tommy scowled, looking away from Wilbur and towards the bookshelf behind him. His fingers dug into his sleeves, and he set his mouth into a firm line. But, a second later, his expression melted and he looked back at Wil.

“Really?” he asked, almost disbelieving.

Wilbur nodded. “Really. I taught Techno a little bit, before. I could easily teach you.”

Tommy eyed the book in front of him. “You could teach me to read that?”

“Well, yes. Eventually.”

Tommy stared at the book a second longer. His eyebrows knit together as if he was trying to solve some complex math equation, and Wilbur had half the mind to wonder if Tommy had been taught any math either when the boy suddenly looked back up.

“Okay,” Tommy muttered, cheeks still slightly pink. “I want to learn.”

Wilbur grinned. He took back the book he’d originally given Tommy and headed back over to the shelf. “Okay, first of all, do you know the alphabet?”

“Ughhh, Wilbur! I’m not a fuckin’ idiot, for prime’s sake!”

Wilbur laughed, and somewhere far away, a crow cackled just the same.

—>>->>->>->>->>—

Phil had almost forgotten the reason he loved traveling so much. But now, two days after leaving Pogtopia, and sitting beside a trickling stream for a dinner of homemade roast duck and wild blackberries they’d plucked from bushes, he remembered.

The sun was setting outside the Green Forest. Through the gaps in the trees, Phil could see the sky—pink, purple, and oranges all blending together like watercolor paint. A light breeze ruffled the leaves like the feathers Phil held in his lap.

He was making something. Phil couldn’t remember the last time he’d made something that wasn’t food for his sons or treaties with other kingdoms. Nevertheless, he wove the feathers together with skilled hands, as if he’d been making wings all his life.

He was experimenting, really. He wasn’t sure if the contraption would actually work or not, but over the past couple days of traveling he’d had a lot of time to think, and this was one of the ideas his brain had come up with and then refused to drop. It hadn’t helped that he found feathers literally everywhere he went. Under his horse’s feet while they traveled, stuck in his hair after a particularly windy day—even now, Phil could see a dark black feather floating down the stream. It was like nature was telling him to make this.

As if to prove him right, a crow cawed somewhere above him.

Phil stuck his tongue out as he poked his needle through another feather. He’d brought a sewing pack in case any clothes got torn while traveling, but thus far they’d had no use for it, so he figured no one would mind if he also used it to bind these wings together. On top of the

thread, he'd also collected a jar of tree sap yesterday to spread over the binding. It would harden and make the wings steadier.

Footsteps crunched in the grass behind Phil, and he turned just in time to see Techno sit down beside him.

"Are you still workin' on those?" Techno asked, mouth half-full with duck.

Phil nodded, turning back to his work. "Yeah. I think I finally figured out the pulley system. See these sticks?" He ran his finger along the zigzag of wooden sticks he'd carefully strung together. "When I pull this string, this stick here will straighten out and open the wings."

Techno watched with mild interest as Phil demonstrated.

"That's cool, Phil. But what're they for?"

"For... me? I don't know, really." Phil ran his fingers along the feathered bit. He hadn't attached the sticks to them yet, but both parts were nearly completed. He just needed a couple more feathers and maybe a bit more tree sap to stick the two parts together. "I just thought it would be fun. And I needed something to keep my hands busy."

He'd needed a distraction. He kept worrying about Wilbur and Pogtopia, and keeping his mind focused on trivial things like gluing feathers together was helpful if only for his own sanity.

Techno turned to look at the stream, and Phil followed his gaze. Clear water bubbled over smooth rocks and spilled down into the current. Leaves and the occasional crow feather spun lazily in the flow, but besides that the water was clear. On the other side of the trickling stream, Phil could see Dream's horse—Spirit—relaxing under a tree. Dream had gone off with Sapnap and George to collect more berries and water for tomorrow's journey. They'd left quite some time ago, though. They should be back any minute.

Phil sighed, threading his needle again. After tomorrow, their little cavalry would be out in the plains. Out there, the sun beat harder and there weren't as many places to stop and rest, but that's why they were preparing for it today. Dream had purposefully stopped at this stream to collect the water further down, where it ran fast enough to be drinkable.

Then, after the plains came the desert, and that's where they'd really be in trouble.

If nothing else, maybe he could use his wings as a shield from the sun.

"Dream's back," Techno grunted.

Phil looked up from his sewing to see Dream, George, and Sapnap all making their way back up the stream. At least five canteens of water dangled off of each of their persons. When they got close enough, Dream hopped across the rocks to Phil and Techno's side of the stream.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing curiously at the mass of feathers in Phil's lap.

"Ah, it's a project." Phil shrugged. "Needed something to keep me busy."

The SMP's king crouched down beside Phil and Techno, green eyes inquisitive as he examined Phil's handiwork. "Interesting. Are they supposed to be wings?"

Techno scoffed. "No. They're just made of feathers and shaped like them," he said sarcastically.

Phil shot him a glare. "Yes, they *are* supposed to be wings," he said to Dream.

Phil wasn't sure what he personally thought of the SMP's king, but Technoblade had obviously made up his mind. For the past two days, almost everything Dream said to Phil's second son had been met with thinly veiled hostility. Maybe it wasn't obvious to Dream, because Techno tended to keep his face carefully neutral while speaking to him, but Phil noticed it. And he hated it.

They were supposed to be teaming with Dream. Supposed to be getting along so that, when they all returned to their respective kingdoms, Pogtopia and the SMP could be on good terms again. It would certainly be nice if they could become allies.

Dream had said he didn't want Phil's land anymore, too. He'd promised. So Phil didn't understand why Techno was acting so standoffish towards him.

Sure, Dream had been difficult in the past. But so far he'd been nothing but kind and accommodating towards them on this trip. That's why Phil couldn't understand Techno's hostility.

"That's cool," Dream said, pushing back to his feet. "You think they'll work?"

Phil shrugged again, looking down at his invention. The wings looked nice; he'd done a good job. More than that, they looked functional. With a few more feathers, and a lot more tree sap, they might actually work.

"Maybe. I guess I'll have to see," Phil said.

Dream nodded. He raised a hand to his forehead, shielding his eyes as he looked off towards the other side of the stream. George and Sapnap were over there, next to Spirit. Sapnap had laid down on the ground, stretching his limbs out like a starfish. George sat beside him, giggling at something he'd said.

Dream turned back. "We should travel a little further from the stream before setting up camp. Animals will come here to drink."

Phil nodded, already beginning to pack up. He tied off the last knot on his thread, then put both it and the needle back into his sewing kit. He tossed the miniature kit into his bag, then slung it over his shoulder and stood up. Techno followed him, picking up the wings.

Dream used the rocks to step back over the stream, waving to Sapnap and George. "Hey guys! Let's get moving!"

Sapnap put a middle finger in the air, and George groaned. Phil chuckled, glancing back at Technoblade, but his second son didn't seem to share his amusement. He was watching

Dream with a stony face, his fingers clenched tightly around Phil's wings.

"Hey, mate, you're gonna crush the feathers," Phil warned, reaching out to take the wings back. "What is up with you? You've been acting weird since we left."

Technoblade grunted. The lack of response made Phil's hair bristle, and he stepped into Techno's line of vision.

"Oi! What is it? I don't mean to be rude, but you're being a bit of a dick. Especially towards Dream."

The mention of Dream's name seemed to snap Techno out of it. He turned to look at Phil. "Eh? Nothing's wrong. I'm not doin' anything to him."

"Lies," Phil said as Techno brushed past him, heading across the stream. He followed quickly behind. "I'm calling bullshit right now. You respond to everything he says with some sort of sarcasm. Can't you just be civil with him for these next few days?"

"I've *been* bein' civil," Techno said, and Phil had to grit his teeth to prevent himself from screaming in frustration.

"You mocked him yesterday when he was talking us through the route we're taking," he said instead.

"He was mansplainin' it."

"You laughed when the tent fell on him last night."

"It was funny, Phil. Come on."

Phil blew out a breath, stepping off the stones and onto dry land. Dream, Sapnap, and George had already packed up, and were leading Spirit and their two other horses away from the stream. They were far out of earshot.

Phil took Techno's arm, forcing him to stop.

"Listen," he said once Techno's eyes met his, "if you don't like Dream, that's entirely up to you. But for me, please, could you at least try a little harder to be nice? He hasn't done anything wrong, and it's unfair for you to treat him like he has."

"Phil—"

"Please." Phil leveled Techno with a hard look. "I'm asking you as your dad, and as Pogtopia's king. You can be civil for a little longer, right? For me?"

Techno sighed, glancing back at the retreating SMP party. Finally, he nodded. "Yeah. I'll be civil."

Phil's face broke into a smile. He squeezed Techno's arm once before letting go. "Thank you, Techno."

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Techno replied with a wave of his hand, but he was smiling.

They fell into step together, grabbing their horses and supplies from beneath the trees and following Dream. Phil wrapped his wings up in tarp and strapped them to his horse’s side, and they jostled along in a steady rhythm as they began walking again. He’d have to finish them tomorrow.

As they walked, Techno lightly knocked his elbow against Phil’s arm. Phil knocked his right back.

When they looked at each other, they were both grinning.

In the dark part of a forest, vines twisted around a tree branch until it snapped off.

Chapter End Notes

Listen, I just think Wilbur and Tommy should get to be brothers.

Hehe, I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Philza's getting his wings!! Tommy's learning to read!! Plot is being set up whether you know it or not!!

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean :D

Just the Two of Us

Chapter Summary

“Interesting. So that's two kids you've got to take care of now? Or are there others I haven't caught wind of?” Dream spoke with a grin in his voice, teasing, but Technoblade instantly stiffened.

His legs tightened around Carl, and the horse snorted.

“Erm, well actually—”

//

Niki makes an appearance, more Crime Boys fluff occurs, and Techno and Phil finally make it to the desert....

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is ["Just the Two of Us"](#) by Grover Washington!

CW: mentions of past abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Thunk!

Tommy groaned as his arrow missed the wooden target completely. It lodged itself into the stable's wall instead, right next to the other five he'd shot and missed with.

Quackity moved forward to pull the arrows out and pass them back. “Don't worry about it. You'll get it eventually.”

Tommy shook his head, fighting back a sneeze. Particles of hay floated in the air around them, and they were making his nose all itchy. He'd gone to ask Wilbur if he'd go shoot with him this morning, but he'd still been asleep, so Tommy had left for the stables—where Wilbur had told him the palace kept extra practice bows—alone. To his surprise, when he'd entered, he'd been met by Quackity wiping down some of the horse saddles. And now here they were, practicing together.

“I don't get how Wilbur's so good at this,” Tommy said, nocking an arrow and raising the bow to the target.

He let go, and the arrow just barely grazed the edge of the target before skittering to the floor. A horse whinnied quietly further down in the stables.

“Wilbur’s been doing this since he was ten,” Quackity said. He was leaning against a wooden post to Tommy’s right, arms crossed over his chest. “He’s got a lot of experience.”

Tommy let loose another arrow. Another miss.

Quackity laughed as Tommy let the bow drop to his side.

“I’m done,” Tommy exhaled, handing Quackity the bow. “Your turn.”

Quackity took the bow, but Tommy walked away before he could see the guard shoot. He headed over the opposite wall, this one filled with old, dull-edged swords. He pulled one down and began flipping it over and over again in his hand.

“You’re good with those, aren’t you?” Quackity’s voice asked from the other side of the room. “I saw Technoblade take you out to the fields with one before. Did he teach you?”

“Yeah,” Tommy said, spinning the blade slowly in one hand. He’d gotten better at switching its position quickly. It flashed as he spun it in a wide circle, then extended it out in front of him as if challenging an opponent.

He’d seen Sapnap do that move, once, back in the SMP. From his bedroom window he could see into the courtyard, where Sapnap and George had been dueling. Well, Sapnap was dueling. George was just standing there, looking incredibly bored while Sapnap tried to goad him into fighting back.

How those two had become Dream’s right hand guards, Tommy didn’t think he’d ever know. But at least they were nicer than Dream. At least they weren’t the ones who’d locked him in his room that day.

Tommy twirled the sword again.

It was strange. He’d been in Pogtopia for over a full week now, and still no one had hit him, yelled at him, or shut him out. In fact, Wilbur had even let him into his office yesterday.

He’d *never* been allowed inside Dream’s office. That place was sacred. The rule was, when Dream was in there, Tommy was not allowed to speak to him. He wasn’t even supposed to knock.

Dream was in there a lot.

Sometimes it was better that way, though. At least while he was in there, the only thing Tommy had to worry about was who was going to let him into the kitchen for dinner. The kitchen doors were always locked, no matter if Dream was working or not. If Tommy wanted food, he either had to ask Dream or find a guard who would sneakily let him inside.

More often than not, he simply missed a meal.

“Tommy? Prime, I’ve been looking everywhere for you.”

Tommy's head snapped towards the stable doors at the sound of Wilbur's voice. Wil stood just outside, his hair askew and shirt rumpled. He was breathing hard, as if he'd just run across the whole field. Maybe he had. The stables were at the very back of the castle grounds, and the only way to get there was to track the worn path through the gardens and field.

Tommy and Quackity glanced at each other, then back at the prince.

"Sorry. You were still sleeping, so I came down here," Tommy explained.

"Still— Still sleeping? How long have you been here?"

"Ahh..." Tommy glanced past Wilbur to the sky outside. It was a bit of an overcast day, and the sun wasn't really visible through the thick clouds. He had no clue what time it was.

Thankfully, Quackity jumped in to answer for him. "It's been awhile," the guard chuckled. He hung the bow back up on the wall, then began plucking arrows off the board. "I've been here since eight, so Tommy probably came in around nine."

"What time is it now?" Tommy asked.

Wilbur let out a breathy laugh. "It's nearly noon."

Oh. Really? That meant he'd been out here for nearly *three hours* trading arrows back and forth with Quackity. He hadn't even eaten breakfast.

As if it could hear him, his stomach growled.

"We should head back," Quackity said.

Wilbur nodded. "Niki's bringing lunch. She should be here any minute."

Tommy hung up his sword and followed the two of them out. As they trekked along the dirt pathway back, the sky began to rumble, and then little droplets of rain started to drizzle down. By the time they made it to the castle entrance, it was pouring.

Tommy shook his arms out, watching water fling itself from his sleeves. He was glad he'd worn one of the shirts Phil had given him today; they were more waterproof than his own clothes. His hair, however, was a lost cause.

The three trudged inside, dripping water everywhere and leaving muddy footprints from the soles of their shoes. Quackity went off to go grab some towels, and ten minutes later Tommy found himself wrapped up and sitting on the stairs, waiting for Wilbur to get back from changing.

He would have gone into the kitchen to find some food, but he wasn't sure if he was allowed. Wilbur hadn't forbade him from the office like Dream had, but maybe the kitchen was different. Plus, Tommy had only ever been in there when someone else was serving the food—like Wilbur or Quackity—so he wasn't quite sure where they kept it all, or if they kept it locked up.

He leaned against the staircase railing, letting his eyes trace over the knight statues close to the front door. There were two of them, each gripping a silver sword in their fist. Tommy wondered if the swords were real.

“Did you change already?”

Tommy flinched as Wilbur’s voice came from right behind him. *Prime*. He really needed to stop scaring him like that.

Wilbur stepped down onto Tommy’s stair and offered him his hand. Tommy took it, allowing Wilbur to pull him to his feet.

“Yeah, I changed. I’m just wearing the towel ’cause my hair’s still all wet, and it’s freezing in here.”

Wilbur chuckled, running a hand through his own wet hair. He’d changed into a slightly more formal shirt than the one he’d been wearing before. It was another loose, flowing shirt—cream colored, with a gold vest over it. Little wildflowers were embroidered along the bottom edges of the vest.

Tommy opened his mouth to tease Wilbur about the flowers when a loud knock came from the front doors.

“That’d be Niki,” Wilbur said, immediately brushing past Tommy and down the stairs.

Niki was short—shorter than Wilbur and Tommy, at least—with shoulder length blonde hair and possibly the bluest eyes Tommy had ever seen. They looked like what Tommy imagined the ocean would look like: bright and blue and sparkling as Wilbur opened the door. She wore an apron over her dress, and held a giant wicker basket of *something* in her hands.

“Prince Wilbur!” she greeted cheerfully.

Wilbur smiled. “Niki, it’s nice to see you again.”

Niki bent in a curtsy, and Tommy was amused to see Wilbur’s cheeks flush pink.

“Oh no, you don’t have to do that,” Wilbur said, waving his hands as if he didn’t know what else to do with them.

“Of course I do,” Niki replied. “You’re the substitute king now, after all.”

Wilbur stepped back, allowing Niki through the doors and into the castle. Tommy followed close behind as the two headed into the foyer.

“That still doesn’t mean you have to *curtsy* to me. We’ve been friends since diapers. This changes nothing.”

Niki laughed, and Tommy found he quite liked the sound. She had a soft voice, and her laughter was equally as sweet. It echoed in the tall, empty entryway.

“Maybe not, but I can still tease you. How’s it been going here? Who’s this?”

“This is Tommy,” Wilbur introduced, gesturing for Tommy to catch up with them. “He’s... uh... he’s a family friend.”

“Oh. Nice to meet you then, Tommy.” Niki smiled, and Tommy found himself smiling back as she reached out to shake his hand. It was a bit complicated with her basket in the way, but somehow they managed.

“Let’s go to the kitchen so you can set that down,” Wilbur said, leading the small group to the left and into the kitchen.

Five minutes later, sandwiches and various assortments of bread, fruit, and vegetables were spread across the kitchen table. Wilbur handed Tommy a plate, letting him make his own meal out of the items Niki had brought.

Apparently, Niki did more than just run a bakery. She had a garden back behind her house where she grew all her produce herself. She also had a nice flower garden, from what Wilbur told him, but she insisted the castle’s was much prettier. Gardening was just something she did for fun. Baking was her real passion.

And boy could Tommy tell. Alongside the lunch food, Niki had somehow managed to hide a whole array of desserts at the bottom of the basket. In a wooden container, there were cookies, raspberry scones, and mini cakes in too many flavors to count. Tommy gawked at them in awe as Niki laid them out on the table.

At some point the guards came to collect their food, Quackity amongst them. Then they left, and it was just Tommy, Wilbur, and Niki in the room again.

Niki picked up her basket, placing the empty dessert container inside and closing the lid. “Well, I should probably get going now,” she said, straightening out her apron and looking up at Wil. “I’ve got a couple other orders to fill before tonight.”

Wilbur nodded, offering to escort her to the door. Tommy trailed behind, but his plate was still full of food in his hands, and he wasn’t sure if he was allowed to leave the kitchen with it. Maybe he should leave it here and come back for it? Wilbur had already finished eating when the guards came through. All that was in his hand now was a single cookie. So should Tommy stay here? Leave?

He looked down at the plate in his hands. He hadn’t had food this good since... maybe not ever. When Dream used to make his birthday cakes, they’d been good, sure, but nothing could ever compare to Niki’s rich, fluffy scones and warm bakery bread. He didn’t want to give it up.

Luckily, Wilbur seemed to catch on to his internal dilemma.

“Why don’t you take your plate up to my room. I’ll meet you there as soon as I walk Niki out,” he suggested.

Tommy's mouth popped open in surprise, but he hurried to close it. He'd never been allowed food inside his room. Food was for the kitchen only, and on rare occasions for picnics outside. He didn't get that often, though. Usually, Dream caught him and forced him back inside. He liked to keep Tommy close, he'd said. Keep him in check, because Tommy was a rebellious kid, and Dream didn't want him getting into trouble.

Tommy pushed these thoughts away, nodding mutely and following Wilbur out the door. He took the foyer stairs two at a time to the top, walking to Wilbur's room almost on autopilot.

Both Wilbur and Techno's rooms were in a different section of the castle from Tommy's guest room. To get there, Tommy had to walk straight back from the stairs and through a hallway filled with paintings of the royal family. A portrait of a much younger Wilbur was up there, right alongside a younger Technoblade. Phil was up there as well, painted sitting on his throne with green robes and a wide smile uncharacteristic for a king on his face. Then, on the other side's wall, there was a much bigger painting of all three of them with a woman Tommy didn't recognize. He could only assume that she was Wilbur's mom, though. Her kind, warm, brown eyes looked just like his.

Tommy turned left at the end of the hall, entering a shorter one with tall windows all along the right side. He could see the stables through them, not too far away.

Wilbur's room was the first one on the left. Tommy pushed the door open, careful not to drop any of his food on the carpet as he entered.

He'd only been in here a total of two times since Phil left, but it was enough for the room to be familiar. The wooden door swung shut behind him, and he crossed the floor to set his plate on Wilbur's desk.

Wilbur's room was about the size of Tommy's room in the SMP lands—not too big, not too small. He had a big, queen sized bed with pale yellow sheets and red curtains on either side that could be drawn shut if he wanted complete darkness. Right now they were tied back, along with the curtains on the bedroom window. Beside Wilbur's bed was the desk where Tommy had set his food, and a wooden chair engraved with what looked like feathers. Leaning up against the wall next to it was Wilbur's bow and a quiver of arrows. Then, across the room was Wilbur's bookshelf, dresser, and the door to his very own bathroom.

Tommy sat down in Wilbur's desk chair and grabbed his lunch. His mouth salivated as he looked down at the collection of food he'd acquired. This was more than he'd ever gotten in Dream's castle. Not to mention the dessert. Desserts were only given to him when he'd done something *really* good. Or when it was a holiday.

Tommy picked up his sandwich and took a bite. Holy *shit* .

He'd gotten about half-way through his sandwich, eaten all the strawberries, and was just about to bite into the raspberry scone he'd nabbed when Wilbur opened the door and stepped inside.

“Hey, sorry. The rain started up again right when Niki was about to leave, so I had to find her a cloak.”

Wilbur walked over to sit on his bed, and that's when Tommy noticed what was in his hand: a book.

"Up for another lesson?" Wilbur asked, noticing Tommy's gaze.

"What's that one?" Tommy asked, choosing not to answer Wilbur's question directly. He left his food abandoned on the desk and plopped down next to Wil on the bed.

Wilbur handed him the book. The cover was a tangy, burnt-auburn color and felt well-worn beneath his hands. There were no words written on the front, but when Tommy flipped it open, the title was written in bold, black ink across the front page.

"D...on...Q...qwi...?" Tommy turned questioning eyes up to Wilbur, who chuckled and reached out to place a finger on the book's title.

"Don Quixote," he read, sliding his finger along the individual letters. "It's a long book, and probably a bit hard for you, but it'll teach you the basics. And when you get too tired I can read some of it to you."

Tommy hummed, flipping the page to the first chapter. The type was a bit small, but the ink was dark enough that he could easily make out each letter. Like Wilbur had done, he slid his finger along the words.

"The... d...e...light...ful—"

"Delightful," Wilbur corrected.

Tommy nodded. "History of the most...?"

"Ingenious. And the next word's 'K' doesn't sound like one. It reads as an—"

"Knight!" Tommy exclaimed, cutting Wilbur off with a grin. "I know that word."

Wilbur chuckled, sliding closer to watch over Tommy's shoulder. "Good to know. You can start the chapter if you want, or keep reading the chapter title. Up to you."

Tommy's eyes skipped down to the next few lines in the chapter title, then down again to the actual beginning of the text. The beginning of the text looked easier, so he slid his finger down the page to rest against the first word.

"Watch how fast I can read this, bitch," Tommy said, grinning and beginning to slide his finger along. "There lived not long since, in a... cer...tin...certain village of the Man...Mancha, the name... what the fuck word is that?"

"Whereof", Tommy."

"Whereof I pur...pos...ly...purposly?"

"Purposely. The next word starts with the 'o' saying its name."

“Purposely omit.”

“Very good!” Wilbur grinned, reaching up to ruffle Tommy’s hair.

Before, Tommy used to flinch whenever Wil put his hands on his head. It felt too much like Dream’s hands in his hair, right before the SMP’s king would pull it to get his attention. But now Tommy was used to the gentle hands, and recognized it as the older boy’s sign of affection. That’s why, when Wilbur kept his hand in his hair—starting to comb through it and then braid strands together while Tommy continued reading—Tommy didn’t complain. Instead, he sat comfortably side by side with his friend, learning to read while the rain pattered against the window outside.

How different his life here was from life in the SMP lands. Here he had people who gave him warm food and let him keep it, who gave him a towel and dry clothes when he was wet, who let him into offices and never locked him anywhere. People who didn’t expect him to get things right the first time, who never hit him, who sat next to him and braided his hair and patiently taught him how to read.

And suddenly Tommy found warm tears were leaking down his face, and he couldn’t see the page through the blur, and Wilbur was asking him what was wrong, but he just shook his head. And then he was wrapped up by a pair of warm, loving arms, and his face was pressed into that person’s shoulder, and he *shouldn’t be crying because big men didn’t cry* but *Prime* ...

“What’s wrong?” Wilbur asked again, and his tone was so genuinely concerned that it spilled a whole fresh round of tears from Tommy’s eyes.

“Nothing,” he choked out, squeezing Wilbur to him like his life depended on it. Because maybe it did. If Dream ever found him, he’d kill him. And Tommy was suddenly very aware of the fact that he didn’t *want* Dream to find him. He didn’t want Dream to look for him, or care about him. Not even a little bit. Not anymore.

“Nothing at all.”

—»-»-»-»-»-—

Techno flinched as the first raindrop hit the tip of his nose and slid off to the ground below.

“Rain’s startin’,” he muttered to Phil.

“Thank Prime.”

They were all on horseback, trodding along through the high grasses of the plains. Phil rode right beside Techno, his horse easily matching Carl’s pace. On Phil’s other side was Dream, and George and Sappnap both trailed behind—each pulling their respective load.

They'd attached some supplies to Carl, as well, but he was a strong horse. He could keep up with or without the heavy weight bearing him down. Attached to either side of his saddle were two giant bags where Phil had stuffed their camping supplies, sets of clothes, and some food they couldn't get out here like bread and fruits. He'd also zipped his wings—now finished—into their own bag. They were massive, stretching out longer than Technoblade was tall when Phil straightened them. Carl carried all of it like a champ, but of course he did. He was Techno's horse.

"It feels nice," Phil said, tilting his face up to the dripping sky.

Techno hummed. "How much further until we reach the desert? Surely this rain can't be a good sign."

"It's not actually that far," Dream piped up from the opposite end of the line. "We should make it there soon."

Techno turned back, setting his sights on the horizon ahead. The plains seemed to stretch on forever. Tall grass rippled in the wind as the storm rolled in and the rain picked up. Besides that, there were only a few trees scattered across the terrain. If Techno squinted, he could just make out the beginnings of a small hill on the other side of the prairie.

The rain fell faster, quickly soaking through Techno's plain shirt and pants. Phil had advised he pack long-sleeved clothes—even though they were going through the desert at the beginning of summer—because he said it would help prevent him from getting sunburnt.

Techno rubbed at his sleeves, immediately thinking of the sunburns he used to get in the Nether. Back then, he'd practically always had one. He could remember when his skin was colored bright, burning pink—even pinker than it was normally—and he'd practically had to bathe in aloe vera juice to soothe the pain. Not to mention the peeling, blistering skin he suffered from after.

The rain slowed as a lighter cloud passed over them. Over the steady pattering, Techno realized Dream was speaking again.

"So. I haven't spoken to you in so long, Philza. How's Pogtopia been doing?"

"Not too bad, honestly. This is probably the biggest event to happen to us in... a while."

"I heard your wife passed away. I'm so sorry. And I'm sorry I didn't offer condolences any sooner, too. I was a bit preoccupied in the SMP at the time."

Phil waved a hand dismissively, but his eyes had gone hazy. "It's alright, don't worry about it. Pogtopia and the SMP weren't quite on the best of terms at that time anyway."

Dream nodded, looking back out at the fields. "True. Although I suppose we're on better terms now, aren't we?"

"I certainly hope so."

The two kings exchanged matching smiles, and Techno fought the urge to cringe. He didn't mind the SMP lands and Pogtopia getting along, but Dream and Philza getting along was another story. Dream's sugar-coated words and expressions weren't fooling Techno. He knew who the man really was.

Dream sighed, bringing a hand up to block the rain from his eyes. "I also heard you'd adopted a son while I was busy. Technoblade, you came from the Nether, right?"

Techno blinked, surprised that Dream was addressing him now. "Uhh... Yup."

"Interesting. So that's two kids you've got to take care of now? Or are there others I haven't caught wind of?" Dream spoke with a grin in his voice, teasing, but Technoblade instantly stiffened.

His legs tightened around Carl, and the horse snorted.

"Erm, well actually—"

"It's just the two of us," Technoblade interrupted Phil, "me and Wilbur."

Phil turned to give him an incredulous look, but Technoblade pretended not to notice. He focused solely on Dream, watching the man's eyes spark with *something* before he averted them.

"Hm," Dream hummed, lightly tugging on his horse's reins. "He must be pretty lonely back at the castle, all on his own."

Technoblade shook his head. "Nah. The guards are all there. Wilbur'll be fine."

Phil, thankfully, didn't try to speak again. He looked down at his horse's saddle instead, placing his hands over the horn and holding tight. The rain picked up again, blowing heavy against their sides as they continued forward.

By the time they made it to the hill Techno had spotted earlier, they were dripping wet. Any hope for the bread in Phil's bags was lost, but at least it wouldn't be much farther now. Only a couple more days of travel through the desert, and they'd have reached the Badlands.

The horses and carts all slowed to a stop atop the hill. The desert stretched before them—bland and dry as the sun started to peek out from behind the clouds.

Techno blew out a breath.

"You guys ready?" Dream asked. He'd been quiet since earlier, even once the rain trickled to an end and conversation was possible again.

Techno looked over at Phil. He also hadn't spoken much since earlier, but now he set his brow and gripped his reins tighter.

"We're ready," he said, determined. "Let's go."

Chapter End Notes

Good morning!! Or evening/night/you know the deal here :]

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Red Desert

Chapter Summary

Tommy knew better than anyone else what these vines could do. He'd seen it. And now, Wilbur needed to protect him from seeing it again.

What do we do now?

"We wait."

//

As the bloodvines draw nearer, Wilbur writes a letter. Miles away, his addressee wonders where this icy feeling is coming from in the middle of a desert...

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is "[Red Desert](#)" by 5sos. It's very underrated, in my opinion, so take a listen if you want!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur yawned as he headed back to his room for the night. It had been a long day.

He'd woken up around eight to make breakfast for himself and Tommy. Then he'd answered a few of the letters citizens had sent to Phil before they knew Wil would be in charge, promising to get on a couple of their small tasks and to relay a few messages to Phil when he returned. After that, Tommy stopped by, and they'd spent a few hours reading some more of Don Quixote before lunch. Then Tommy had practically insisted Wil come out to the fields and spar with him for a little while, which he'd reluctantly done before returning to the office to read, answer a couple more letters, and finally make dinner downstairs, eat, and check up with the guards.

The last thing he'd done was send a couple of them out on patrol, hoping to hear back from them about the vines, but it had been nearly two hours and none of them had returned yet. Apparently they'd gone further into the forest than Wilbur had thought they would. That, or they hadn't caught on to the fact that Wilbur wanted to be informed—even if they didn't find anything—and had gone to bed assuming he wouldn't wait for them.

Well, they were partially right at least, because Wilbur was done waiting. He was exhausted, and he was going to bed.

He rubbed his eyes as he crossed the balcony above the foyer. Tommy had gone back to his room for the night an hour ago, so he was probably asleep already. The castle was quiet

without him. The candles flickered as Wilbur passed the banister, everything silent and peaceful.

“Wilbur!”

Wilbur nearly tripped over thin air as someone called his name from below. It was Quackity, running in from the front doors with a panicked expression on his face. He took the stairs up to the balcony before Wilbur could even ask what was wrong.

“Wil,” Quackity panted, grabbed Wilbur’s shoulder to steady himself.

Somewhere to his right, a door creaked open, spilling an extra dose of light into the hall. Wilbur looked over to see Tommy staring back at him from the door to the guest hallway, blue eyes wide and concerned.

“What is it?” Wilbur asked, turning back to Quackity.

“The vines... What Dream said... He must have made a mistake... Or underestimated them.”

“What? What do you mean?”

“They’re in the forest, Wilbur, and growing quick. There’s no way it’ll be another two weeks before they get here. I give them one, at most.”

“One week?”

Quackity nodded. “Prime, if we hadn’t sent people a little bit further into the forest—”

“Is everyone okay?” Wilbur cut in.

“Oh, yeah. Everyone’s fine. We haven’t seen the army yet, either. But... I don’t think Philza will be back before they get here.”

Wilbur made eye contact with Tommy over Quackity’s shoulder. The younger boy looked completely petrified as he stood in the doorway, frozen.

“Wil?” he asked, voice small. “What are you gonna do?”

—»-»-»-—

Wilbur hummed to himself as he dipped his father’s quill into ink and set it to paper. He tended to hum when he was nervous or stressed, and, in this case, he was both.

Tommy fidgeted from across the room, keeping close to the walls, while Quackity leaned over the desk in front of Wilbur.

“You said a week, tops?” Wilbur asked, glancing up.

Quackity nodded. “Yeah. I mean, that’s not completely terrible, but... Phil’s still gone.”

“We know what to do,” Wilbur said, forcing confidence into his voice. He wasn’t sure who he was trying to reassure: himself or Quackity? “Phil already told us what we should do; what he would do if he was here.”

“Right, of course, but... Wilbur there’s a lot of vines out there. I’m not even sure that fire will stop them.”

“It’ll have to.”

Wilbur signed off his letter with a hasty, looping W.W.—his initials—before folding the paper and sliding it into an envelope. He exhaled, straightening up and handing Quackity the letter. “Besides, Phil can’t be all the way in the Badlands yet. It hasn’t been long enough. Once he gets this, he’ll turn around wherever he is and come back.”

Quackity shifted uncertainly, but Wilbur pretended not to notice. He knew Phil. The second he read this, he’d turn around and come back right away. He’d leave the rest of the group behind, if he had to, in order to go faster and make it back in time.

One week.

Wilbur swallowed. “Well, go on. Go bring that to the messenger. He knows the route they’re taking, and to go fast.”

Quickly, Quackity nodded and slipped out the door. Not without one last concerned glance behind him, though, that Wilbur pretended not to recognize. It would be fine. Even if Phil didn’t make it back in time, Wilbur knew what to do. He’d been placed in charge for a reason, and now it was time to uphold that responsibility.

“Wil?”

Wilbur blinked. He’d forgotten Tommy was in the office with him.

“Is... are we gonna be okay?” Tommy asked. He’d stuck himself to the wall like a fly, and even now he seemed petrified to make a move.

Wilbur sank into his dad’s chair. “Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

Wilbur nodded, placing his elbows down on the desk and then plopping his head into his hands. The adrenaline spike from Quackity’s announcement in the hall was beginning to die down, and the exhaustion from before hit tenfold.

He heard a shuffle on the floor in front of him, and then Tommy was sitting down in the chair across the desk.

“What do we do now?” he asked quietly.

Wilbur hated Tommy's quiet voice. He hated that he and Quackity had scared him. This wasn't something to be scared over. This wasn't something Wilbur should be scared of. He'd already accepted this as his duty. If he had to burn the fields, so be it. If he had to do it without his dad, fine. He'd agreed. He'd stepped up. He was in charge.

"Wilbur?"

Wilbur looked up, meeting Tommy's eyes. For the first time, he recalled something Tommy had said in the throne room the night he'd arrived: *"I saw a man kill his wife after it touched him. He was telling her to touch it too, that it would make her happy, and when she said no, he..."* Tommy had never finished that sentence, but he didn't need to. Wilbur got the picture.

Tommy knew better than anyone else what these vines could do. He'd seen it. And now, Wilbur needed to protect him from seeing it again.

What do we do now?

"We wait."

—»-»-»-»-»-—

Phil tipped his bucket hat further down over his forehead. The desert sun was brutal. They'd been traveling under it for three days, and Phil wasn't sure how much longer he could take it. The rays beat down on them twelve hours out of twenty-four, and—without the giant canteens of water that Dream's carriages helped carry—they would have been dried as raisins after two. Phil was increasingly glad that they'd stopped at that one stream to fill up again before continuing.

Phil squinted through the sun at Technoblade sitting opposite him on the sand. He'd been quiet for an awfully long time. His face was turned towards the ground, brow furrowed, and he'd been gently sifting sand through his fingers for the past ten minutes.

Phil watched him sift for a moment longer before asking, "What is it, mate?"

Techno looked up. "Huh? Oh. Nothin'. I'm just... when are we gonna move again?"

"Soon."

Surprisingly, it was not Phil who'd answered.

Dream walked over, using his foot to clear a flat space in the sand before sitting down.

"We're waiting for it to get a bit later so it'll be dark when we arrive. It'll help with stealth."

"Are there people in the castle?" Phil asked.

Dream shrugged. "I'm not sure. No one from the SMP has actually been inside before."

Phil frowned, glancing off towards the dusty horizon. Sand dunes sloped up and down like golden waves below the wide, blue sky.

They'd made it to the very edge of the Badlands. This stretch was all desert, eventually turning into the red packed stone and dirt of the Nether. But the Badlands were also full of greenery and hills, mountains and wide open plains. It was kind of the central hub between the Nether and the SMP lands, and, because of that, it held little elements of both.

Techno slid another handful of sand through his fingers, obviously tuning out of the conversation. That was fine. Although Phil wished he'd try a little bit harder to get along with Dream, at least being silent was a step forward from being a sarcastic little shit.

Dream pulled the bandana around his neck tighter. It was bright red, standing out from the rest of his pale green attire. He'd put it on when they'd first entered the desert, and it was such an unusual item of clothing to see on a king that Phil had done a double take.

Dream must have seen Phil looking this time, because he pulled the bandana further down on his neck so he could speak clearly.

"It's my son's. Not mine," he explained, fingering it loosely. "Red's not quite my color, is it?"

"You have a son?"

"Well, adopted son. You and Wilbur met him, didn't you? All those years ago when you last came to the SMP? He was only about five or six years old, then."

Phil blinked, taken aback. Now that Dream mentioned it, he did recall a small, blond-haired boy toddling around Dream's side occasionally during their last meeting in the SMP lands. That was a slightly big thing to just forget, Phil thought now. But at the same time, shortly after he'd gotten back to Pogtopia from that visit he'd found Techno on his doorstep, and then Kristin had gotten sick, and then she'd passed and... Philza had had a lot on his mind back then.

Even Techno seemed shocked by the news. He'd gone completely still—hands no longer sifting sand.

"He's actually gone a bit... uh... missing, right now." Dream scratched the back of his neck. "We had a bit of an argument a few weeks ago, and he ran away."

"Whoa, what?" Phil interrupted. "Shouldn't you be out looking for him?"

If either of his sons ever went missing, Phil would be worried sick. He wouldn't be able to sleep, or eat, or think about anything but finding them. How in the world could Dream be here, searching out vines, while his son was potentially in danger?

"Don't worry," Dream said, "I have guards out looking for him as we speak. I think they've almost tracked him down."

Dream's words did nothing to calm the second-hand panic in Phil's chest, but he pushed the feeling down anyway. Why should he care about Dream's business? Dream, as the kid's

adoptive father, obviously knew the best for his son. If he wasn't worried, Phil shouldn't be either. Besides, he barely even remembered the kid.

"How old is he now?" Phil asked. "Thirteen? Fourteen?"

"Fourteen, and a troublemaker. I think this running away is just another of his rebellious antics." Dream chuckled, shaking his head, but there was something in his eyes that didn't match his tone.

An icy feeling grazed the edge of Phil's spine, but just before it could completely sink in, Techno spoke up.

"Can we move yet? I'm sick of sittin' out in this heat."

Phil sighed, about to jokingly tell Techno to quit complaining, but one look at his son's pale face and burning eyes made him close his mouth. Was he okay?

Dream hummed. "I suppose we could start packing up. The sun should start setting in about half an hour, so it'll be cooler."

Techno stood up, eyes still bright with some emotion Phil couldn't quite decipher. "Great. Go help your team, and I'll help Phil."

By all means, Dream—as a king—shouldn't have been letting Technoblade order him around. But he left anyway, shooting one last parting smile over his shoulder at Phil before retreating to George and Sapnap's tent. They'd set the tents up to get out of the sun for a bit, but it hadn't really helped. Instead, the insides of the small spaces had turned into mini-ovens. Out of everyone who'd set one up, George and Sapnap were the only ones who'd actually stayed inside.

"Are you alright, mate?" Phil asked once Dream had left, turning to Techno.

"I'm fine," Techno replied through clenched teeth. He bent down and started pulling tent strings out from under the heavy sandstones they'd used to hold them down. "I just wanna get this over with."

Phil sighed. "I know. I want to get this done too, so we can get home to Wil, but we have to be patient. I'd rather go slowly and make sure the bloodvines are gone for good than rush and have something happen back home."

Techno nodded. He yanked the last string from the stone and started rolling up the tent. It was small, and would be strapped to either Carl or George and Sapnap's horses.

Phil smiled, giving his son a gentle pat on the back. "Come on, we're nearly there. Plus, we haven't heard anything from Wil. That must mean things are going well back there."

Techno hummed his agreement. He picked up the tent, setting off towards Sapnap's horse to pack it up. Phil followed behind, sand sifting through his sandals as he shuffled along.

He chuckled. “What do you think Wilbur and Tommy are getting up to all alone?” he pondered aloud. “Running around the castle? Burning food? Hopefully Wil hasn’t been subjecting Tommy to grilled cheese every—”

“Shh!”

Phil was cut off as Techno whirled around, grabbing Phil’s shoulders. His eyes were wide and panicked. Behind him, George, Sapnap, and Dream had all emerged from one of their tents, and were now carefully pulling it down to pack away.

Phil’s attention slid back to Techno’s face. “What?”

Techno loosened his hold and drew back. “Nothing,” he finally said, shaking his head and turning away. “Nothin’. Let’s just go pick up.”

Phil frowned, but followed after his son. In the pit of his stomach, the icy feeling started to grow.

Chapter End Notes

jaws theme starts playing welp. This chapter's the transition between fluff and hardcore plot mode. You've been warned.

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Crimson Blaze

Chapter Summary

“Come on, Techno. Touch it. You could have anything you desire. Power, bloodshed, silence, a family...”

“I have a family,” Techno immediately shot back.

“Not for long.”

//

Bloodvines, bloodlines, and lots and lots of TNT...

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is "[Crimson Blaze](#)" by 2WEI.

CW: mentions of blood (just the word) and abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream wasn't stupid.

He woke up earlier than the others that morning, rubbing sleep from his eyes as he pushed back his tent flap and stepped out into the desert sun. The whole group had taken to sleeping in later to avoid the harsh sun, and to be able to stay up late and continue walking once the sun set. Because of this, he wasn't all that surprised that the sun was already high in the sky and everyone else was still sleeping.

Dream pushed his feet deeper into the warm sand. They'd make it to the Crimson Castle tonight. If they were lucky, maybe they'd even be heading back before dawn.

He surveyed the land before him—bare and flat and endlessly hot—and that's when he noticed the steady kicking up of sand coming from about two miles away.

It was a man on horseback. He must have seen Dream, because he kicked into his horse's side and sped up, galloping directly towards him.

Dream frowned. What was a rider doing so far out in the desert?

“Sir! Sir!” the rider shouted as he got closer.

Dream stepped forwards to meet him. “Yes?”

The horse rider skid to a stop once he'd reached Dream, scattering sand in the air all around them. Before he'd even completely stopped, the man hopped off the horse's back and ran to Dream, frantically waving a letter in his hand.

"Your Highness! Sorry, I thought you were a guard before," he panted, out of breath. He bent over—whether in a clumsy attempt to bow or simply because he was so tired, Dream wasn't sure—and held the letter out. "This is for King Philza. It's from Prince Wilbur, and it's urgent."

Dream took the letter, glancing over the looping address 'To King Philza Watson', before looking up at the messenger. "Thank you," he said, nodding curtly. "I'll bring it to him right away."

He expected the messenger to go, but, instead, the young man shifted back and forth between his feet. Was he waiting for something?

Dream raised an impatient eyebrow. "You can leave, now."

"Oh." The rider backed off. "Right, right. Erm... Shouldn't I bring the prince a message back?"

Dream tilted his head. "That's hardly necessary. If this message is truly as urgent as you say, Philza will be returning to the castle anyway, right?"

The messenger hesitated, and for a moment Dream thought he'd have to resort to force to get him to leave, but then the man nodded his head and mounted his horse.

"Alright. Thank you, Your Highness."

With that, the messenger turned tail and rode back the way he'd come, leaving nothing but a cloud of kicked up sand in his stead. Dream waited until he'd turned to a small speck on the horizon, then tore open the letter. Inside was a single piece of parchment. He unfolded it, revealing a block of black-inked text.

Dad,

The time you estimated must have been incorrect. The vines have already reached the middle of the Green Forest, and are bordering on entering Pogtopia's territory.

Quackity and I have it under control for now—we've estimated about another week before they actually reach our grounds—but, unless you've already destroyed the roots, they will get here.

I know the plans, and will execute them if necessary.

Love you,

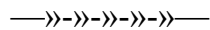
- W.W.

Dream ran a finger gently across the dried ink. The words “love you” were scrawled messily, as if it had been a split-second decision to include them. The rest of the note was fairly impressive, though. For an eighteen-year-old under the stress of leading a kingdom, Wilbur wrote eloquently and kept an attitude of calm control despite the nervousness he must have been feeling. He would be a good leader, one day.

Unfortunately, that day would never come.

The paper tore in half easily. And then in half again. And again. And again. Until it was just bits of parchment nearly as small as the pebbles littering the sand below Dream’s feet. He hummed as he watched the pieces fly from his hands, scattering away in the breeze.

Dream wasn’t stupid.



As they got closer and closer to the Crimson Castle, the vines began to appear.

First it was the leafy tail-end of one slung over a sand dune. Then there was a small coil to the left, a larger one to the right, and suddenly they were in the thick of it all. Phil had never seen so much crimson in his life. It was crimson like Wilbur’s scraped knee after falling in the castle gardens; crimson like the battered cloak Techno had worn when he arrived on Phil’s doorstep at eleven-years-old; crimson like red roses in the garden; crimson like Kristin’s favorite dress.

Crimson spread everywhere, trickling like tendrils of water through the sand. Leaves and thorns sprouted from the coils, and eventually the group abandoned their horses so they could weave their way through them.

Phil followed Techno through the maze of vines. They both had drawn their swords some time ago, and they used them to slash themselves a pathway as they walked along.

“Do not touch the vines,” Dream had reminded them all before they entered. He’d also made them put on clothes with the most coverage possible to avoid skin-contact.

Thinking of Dream, Phil glanced to his right. Dream was next to him, carving out the right-hand side of their path. The three of them all had to pitch in so that Sapnap and George could steer the carriages of TNT to the castle entrance.

“Almost there,” Dream said now, glancing ahead. “See where the vines pile up? That’s one tower. The other two are almost buried by the sand.”

Phil looked ahead, following Dream’s gaze to the pile of vines stretching up in front of them. He’d known that was where they were headed the whole time, but he hadn’t realized the

castle was *buried* . Dream had said it was underground, but Phil had assumed that meant it had been built that way, not that it had been drowned in sand.

“Are we blowin’ those vines up to get inside?” Techno asked.

Dream nodded. “Yeah. But we’re going to try and use as little TNT as possible. We need to save most of it for the inside. Do you have torches?”

Techno and Phil both nodded this time. Phil had his unlit torch tucked into the sash around his waist, while Techno had his hidden somewhere inside his cloak.

“Good. I have the matches. If you need to use fire to clear some of the vines in your way, those will be helpful.”

It only took a few more minutes of careful cutting for them to make their way to the castle entrance. Up close, it was possible to see details of the castle hidden underneath the vines. The walls were made up of some tan colored stone—likely sandstone—all stacked on top of each other. The entrance was almost completely closed off with vines, but around it’s frame Phil glimpsed carved details in the stone that merged together to resemble a large snake. It encircled the half-oval shaped entrance, polished eyes glittering like a real snake’s would have. Maybe they were made of gemstones.

“Alright, light up,” Dream said, passing Techno and Phil each a match. He took one for himself, and all three of them lit their torches together.

Then it was time for the TNT.

Techno helped Dream pull a heavy pack of the explosive from Sappnap’s cart, and together they placed it in front of the castle doors.

“Stand back,” Dream warned. And once they all took a couple steps back, “Further.”

Phil stood next to Techno as Dream lit the stack of dynamite, then ran towards them.

Boom!

Phil grimaced, covering his face with his arm and turning away from the blast. It seemed to echo in the silence that followed, filling Phil’s ears with a horrible ringing sensation for just a second before he recovered.

When he turned back, the vines over the entrance had been blown to bits, and the ones looping along the walls were torn and flaming. It was such a familiar sight that, for a second, Phil was sure he was back in his dream again.

“Come on, Phil!”

It was Techno speaking, Phil realized as a warm hand brushed his arm. He blinked.

“Sorry, I’m coming. Let’s go.”

The two of them followed Dream back towards the castle. Once they reached the entrance again, Dream made them stop and take a few pieces of TNT to bring with them. The plan was to get to the heart of the vines, and plant all of their TNT together to blow it up.

Sapnap and George stuffed some into their weaponry belts. Dream slotted a few sticks into the cross-body carrier he wore. Techno held some in his free hand, while Phil tucked his carefully into the side of his sash.

Techno and Sapnap pushed the double doors to the castle open—revealing the massive, dark staircase descending down into it. And then, finally, it was time.

“Let’s go,” Techno said confidently, leading the way with his torch. Sapnap followed behind, and then George—all three’s lights getting further and further away as they descended the staircase.

Phil stepped forward, about to follow his son, when a hand on his shoulder forced him to stop.

“Philza, before we do this... I know you have my son.”

Out of all the things Phil had expected Dream to say, that had not been one of the options.

Utterly confused, Phil responded the only logical way he could.

“What?”

“Tommy. I know you have him,” Dream said, his voice low and scarily cold. “Give him back.” His hand squeezed Phil’s shoulder tighter, probably leaving indentions on the skin beneath his sleeve.

Tommy? Tommy was Dream’s son? Tommy was—

Dream chuckled. “I figured you didn’t know,” he said, eyes glinting poisonous green, “but Techno definitely does. I don’t know what Tommy’s told him, but he belongs with me. He’s my son. Anything I do is for his own good. Plus—” Dream smiled, but it was so twisted and terrifying in the torchlight that it did nothing to reassure Phil. “—he’s a bit over-dramatic. You know how kids are.”

Phil shook his head slowly, struggling to comprehend. “Wait... *what?* ”

Tommy was Dream’s adoptive son? His son who’d run away? Why had he done that? And Techno *knew*?

Phil was barely listening anymore. Instead, a million memories flooded his head at once.

Techno grabbing his shoulders and hushing him when he was talking about Tommy around Dream. Dream talking about his son, and Technoblade immediately paling. Techno being sarcastic, and interrupting, and hating Dream. Why *did* he hate Dream so much?

Then there was Tommy himself. Tommy, nowhere to be seen any time Dream was around. Tommy, going quiet and flinching back in the dining room. Why had he done that? What had Phil said to make him that scared? He'd been talking about leaving for the bloodvines, hadn't he? He'd been talking about Dream.

Tommy's hands shaking. The strange patches on his arms—bruises? The night he'd shown up in the throne room, clothes torn and dirtied, stick thin, clutching his few possessions to him like they were all he had left. Flinching at Quackity's hand on his shoulder. Looking *so incredibly scared*, like a caged animal.

Phil's heart began to pound.

"He's a bit overdramatic. You know how kids are."

"Fourteen, and a troublemaker. I think this running away is just another of his rebellious antics."

"I don't know what Tommy's told him—"

"Anything I do is for his own good."

The sadistic look in Dream's eyes. The smile Phil now realized had always been fake.

Even if Tommy was legally Dream's son, something bad must have happened to make him run away, because Tommy was certainly *not* the things Dream said he was: a troublemaker, rebellious, overdramatic...

This was the kid who'd cleaned dishes and shot peas. Who'd made Wilbur smile again. Who Wilbur trusted enough to bring his favorite bow out around. Who looked scared almost all the time, and had taken *days* to warm up to Phil.

The same, icy feeling tingled down Phil's back. This time, he decided he had a better idea of what it was.

Dream's fingers loosened slightly around Phil's shoulder. "Listen," he said, voice carefully neutral, "keeping my son from me, kidnapping him from me, is a crime punishable by imprisonment in not only the SMP, but in Pogtopia too. Your sons, Techno and Wilbur—I know Wilbur must be in on this too—have been keeping Tommy from me. I could send them to jail, Philza."

Dream sighed, gesturing around with the hand holding his torch. Phil flinched back as the flames came close enough to heat his skin.

"I could do that, but I'm a merciful leader. So, instead, I'll give you a choice." Dream looked back down at Phil, green eyes practically glowing. "You can either hand over your land, or I'll have your sons thrown in prison."

Phil's eyes widened. "*Excuse me?*" he managed to whisper.

Dream nodded. "You kidnapped my son."

“ *Your son* ran away from you. And I wonder why.”

It might have been a bit of a low blow, but Phil was angry now. Besides, Tommy *had* run away from Dream. On top of that, he’d also hidden where he was from and the fact that he actually did have family from... well, from Phil at least. Apparently, Techno already knew that. And potentially Wilbur too. But Tommy must have hidden it for a reason. Probably because he didn’t want to go back, and there were only so many reasons Phil could come up with for why a child wouldn’t want to return home.

The words had their intended effect. Dream bristled. “Don’t fall for his traps, Philza. I don’t know what he’s said, but Tommy’s manipulative. He lies to get his way.”

“He’s a *kid* .”

“Give him back.”

“ *No* .”

Phil surprised even himself with the forcefulness of his rejection. Dream blanched, and his fingers loosened on Phil’s shoulder just enough for Phil to yank himself away from the taller man. Once he stood alone—no longer pinned by Dream’s hand—he pulled himself up to his full height and glared. “You said you didn’t want my land before, and I won’t be giving it to you now. My sons did not ‘kidnap’ anyone. And as for Tommy, I think we can talk to him when we get back to Pogtopia.”

Tommy was a good kid. Phil wasn’t sure when he’d grown to care about him quite as much as he did now, but he knew he didn’t want to see the kid hurt anymore than he already appeared to be. If he didn’t want to go with Dream, Phil had a sneaking suspicion of the reason why. He hoped he was wrong, but if he wasn’t...

Dream’s face hardened. “You’re making a mistake, Philza.”

Phil lifted his chin, about to respond, when a bloodcurdling scream came from inside the castle. It echoed up the sandstone stairs, immediately filling Phil with a dreadful, sick feeling.

That was Techno’s scream.

“ *Dad!* ”

Without waiting for Dream, Phil ran into the castle.

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Dream twiddled a stick of dynamite between his fingers. The fiery red packaging matched the crimson vines slowly stretching and regrowing over the castle walls.

It was actually kind of a pretty palace. If it hadn't been covered in bloodvines—a term Tommy had coined when the plant first showed up in the SMP lands—he might have called it beautiful. Too bad he wouldn't be seeing the inside.

Dream turned away, heading back towards the carts and his horse. George and Sapnap were still inside, but they knew the plan. If Dream didn't meet them inside in the next ten minutes, they'd know what to do.

Dream grabbed Spirit's reins and hoisted himself up onto her saddle. He readjusted his sword—Nightmare—in its sheath around his waist, and set his sights back towards the North, where he knew Pogtopia was waiting.

He wasn't stupid. He'd seen Tommy in the window the day they left Phil's castle. Over the course of their traveling, he'd figured out that Phil, at least, didn't seem to know Tommy belonged to him. But Techno did. Techno, who had just screamed for help from somewhere inside.

Prime knew what that was all about. It wasn't part of Dream's plan, but who knew? Maybe it would wind up helping him anyway. It would certainly distract Philza for the time being.

Dream glanced back at the Crimson Castle one last time, then flicked Spirit's reins.

“Let's go,” he said. And they were off.

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

The vines were getting closer.

The messenger had returned a day ago, explaining how he'd left Wilbur's letter with Phil and that the king should be back soon. But Wilbur was running out of time before the vines entered the kingdom, and there were more of them than they'd previously thought.

Wilbur had seen them himself a couple days ago. The morning right after Quackity had come to tell him about the approaching vines, Wilbur had gone out to the forest with him and a couple of the other guards. Wilbur had seen the blood red vines coiled around the tree trunks. He saw their thorns sticking into dead logs, the way they slunk forward every so often, growing another few inches before curling back. He saw the fallen tree branches from vines squeezed too tight, like cobras around their prey.

The sight that stuck with him most, though, was the sight of a small, frail vine that had threaded itself through the same looped tree trunk Wilbur had shot an arrow through that day with Tommy and Techno. The arrow had never been collected, and the vine had snapped it clean in two.

If a tiny vine like that could snap one of Wilbur's arrows in half—if the other vines could break thick tree branches like they were nothing more than toothpicks—Wilbur didn't want to

think about what they would do to Pogtopia's gates, fences, farms, and houses. More than that, Wilbur didn't want to think about what the army that was surely following close behind those vines would do.

Unfortunately, he had no choice but to think about it, because both were coming fast. Faster than anticipated, and stronger, and—

Wilbur had made the executive decision to call for help.

After a sleepless night, he'd written a letter to Snowchester's leader, King Tubbo, and practically begged for the support of his army. Tubbo, bless his heart, hadn't even written back. He'd shown up two days later on the castle doorstep, ten other men on horseback behind him.

"*How'd you get here so fast?*" Wilbur had asked, befuddled and still rubbing sleep from his eyes.

Tubbo had shrugged. "*I invented this motor device for boats, recently. You put it on the bottom, and they go all quick. I used them to cross the water, and then we rode horses the rest of the way here.*" He glanced behind him, then rubbed the back of his neck. "*The rest of the army will be here in a day or so. There were only so many boats big enough to bring horses across.*"

It didn't matter. Any help was better than none.

They'd begun training the citizens. Pogtopia only had so many guards, since it was normally such a quiet kingdom, so it had been necessary to inform the citizens of their need to fight. Wilbur didn't want to go so far as to say he'd drafted, but he'd certainly made it clear that anyone above the age of eighteen should consider coming to the castle for training. He hadn't expected much; maybe a couple hundred people, max, out of their three thousand population. But no, it was incredible how many people came to the castle for training. It made him wish Techno was around, if only to help teach. He'd certainly taught Tommy well with a sword.

Together, he and Tubbo had gotten a straggling little army formed. Wilbur was proud of it. Now he just hoped no one had to die for it.

Wilbur leaned against the castle balcony, summer's late-night air tickling his face. It was dark save for the lights twinkling in the village, and above the forest he could see thousands of glittering stars.

Tubbo sat on the ground beside him, legs criss-crossed. Tommy was right beside the younger king, his feet dangling through the railings and off the side of the castle. He and Tubbo had become quite the inseparable pair, recently. Wilbur wasn't sure what Tubbo had done, exactly, to gain Tommy's trust so quickly, but it was obvious that the younger boy liked him. They giggled in the halls and sparred against each other in training and cracked hundreds of jokes over dinner. The worst was when they'd started picking up on each other's speech mannerisms, and began to jokingly call each other 'big men'.

They'd formed a friendship faster than Wilbur had time to blink, but he couldn't complain. It was nice to see Tommy gaining confidence.

Besides, Tubbo clicked with everyone he met anyway. The young king was known for his approachability. He was incredibly kind, and attracted people to him like moths to a flame.

Now that Wilbur thought about it, that exact quality was probably the reason Tubbo had been able to step up to the throne so young.

"It's nice out here," Tommy said, breaking through Wilbur's thoughts.

Wilbur hummed, looking down at the blond. "It is. Did you know this is actually where my parents greeted the people right after they got married."

"Really?" Tubbo asked, glancing down at the stone beneath him.

"Yeah. There's a painting of it somewhere in Phil's bedroom. I think he keeps it in a chest there for safe keeping."

"He hasn't hung it?" Tubbo asked.

Wilbur shook his head. "No. I think... I think he doesn't really want to look at it. Not now, at least. I know it's been two years since my mom... you know... but it still hurts."

Tubbo nodded, looking back up at the sky. "I know how it feels, Big Man. It takes a long time."

They were silent for a few more minutes. Wilbur quietly wondered when Phil would be getting back. It had only been a couple days since he'd sent the message, but the journey was quicker without hauling supplies, and he'd assumed Phil would drop everything to come back. Maybe he'd been mistaken, though. Maybe he shouldn't have assumed.

Eventually, Wilbur joined the other two boys on the floor, letting his feet dangle through the stone rails with Tommy's. He didn't really want to think about it right now. This was the first moment of peace he'd gotten in days, and he wanted to enjoy it for at least a little longer.

A gust of wind rippled through the treetops and the grass below, and then Tommy spoke.

"I never knew my biological parents, really. They died before I was old enough to remember. But my mom had this music disc—" He chuckled, thick and wet, and leaned forward to look through the rails. "—and I always pretend I can hear her humming it when I listen to it. It's stupid, I know—"

"It's not stupid," Tubbo interrupted.

Tommy smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Thanks, Tubbo. But it is a little silly. I mean, I don't even remember what her voice sounded like."

"Do you still have the disc?"

Tommy was quiet for a moment, then nodded. "Yeah."

"Ooh, I wanna hear!" Tubbo said at the same time that Wilbur looked over at Tommy, surprised.

"You have it here?" he asked.

Tommy nodded, pushing up from the floor to stand. "I brought it in my bag. I haven't played it since before I left the SMP, though. Uh, do you have a music box?"

That's how, ten minutes later, Wilbur found himself lying on the castle balcony, watching the stars above while tinkling music sounded from Phil's old jukebox. Tommy laid next to him, with Tubbo on the other side to effectively sandwich him in. The blond's eyes were closed, but Wilbur didn't think he was actually asleep.

"It's a pretty song," Wilbur commented, turning his head to look at Tommy.

Tommy nodded, cracking his eyes open just the slightest amount. "You could pro'ly play it on the guitar," he slurred drowsily.

Wilbur smiled. He scooted closer until he could nudge Tommy's shoulder with his own. "Would you like that?"

Tommy nodded again before tilting his head, resting it against Wilbur's arm. "Yeah. Tha'd be nice," he sighed quietly, and a protective warmth suddenly blossomed in Wilbur's chest.

He reached up to run a hand through Tommy's hair. Out of it's ponytail, it was actually quite long. It reached Tommy's shoulders, and tickled Wilbur's neck whenever he moved. Maybe, if Tommy ever wanted him to, Wilbur could give it a trim. Or Techno. Techno was much better with hair.

The final notes of the song drifted out over the group, and then the jukebox clicked, signaling the end of the disc.

"This is nice," Tubbo said after a moment of silence had passed. "It's... relaxing."

"I definitely needed this," Wilbur agreed.

Tommy hummed from his shoulder.

Tubbo shifted on the ground, placing his hands behind his head and crossing his ankles. "I know you've only been king for a little while, Wilbur, but do you ever feel like it's all too much?" When Wilbur didn't immediately answer, he continued quietly. "I feel like that sometimes."

"I mean, this is definitely a lot," Wilbur said, gesturing up at the sky, but he knew Tubbo got the picture.

Confirming his belief, Tubbo nodded. "Yeah. But your dad's coming back soon, right? So at least it won't be just you."

“He should be.” Wilbur exhaled, closing his eyes and letting the breeze rush over his face. “I’m still worried, though. If he doesn’t make it back in time, it’s entirely up to me. And I should be okay with that, I signed up for that when I said I could stay here, but it’s... frightening, to say the least, to know a whole army relies on you. Before, I thought all I’d really have to do alone was finish those trade routes with you.”

Tubbo snorted, immediately pressing his hands over his face. “Oh prime, don’t remind me of those. I did *such* a bad job writing them.”

“You really didn’t,” Wilbur said, aiming for reassurance. “They weren’t that bad.”

“They were and I know it. I fucking *hate* reading and writing,” Tubbo laughed. “It took me forever to figure those documents out ‘cause the words were all tricky and shit.”

“Wor’s are tricky,” Tommy agreed, eyes still closed. “Like little fuckin’ puzzle pieces but with sounds and letters.”

“And grammar,” Tubbo added.

Tommy groaned, and Wilbur burst out laughing. Eventually, the other two boys joined in. They laughed until their eyes teared up and their lungs burned and they physically had to stop. Then they laid in relative silence, save for the occasional snicker or content sigh.

It really hadn’t even been that funny of a joke, Wilbur thought. But it was late, and tension in the castle had been at an all-time high for the past few days. Anything to break that tension was welcome.

“We should be getting to bed soon,” Wilbur finally said. He slid his shoulder gently out from under Tommy’s head, ignoring the boy’s quiet whine of protest while he sat up. To his amusement, Tommy didn’t follow. The kid was completely passed out on the balcony floor.

Wilbur smiled and lowered his voice. “We have another day of training tomorrow, so—”

That was when he heard it. At first, it was quiet. So quiet he thought he’d imagined it. But, slowly and steadily, it grew louder and louder, closer and closer, coming from the field.

Wilbur stood up, Tubbo quickly following. The two of them peered off the side of the balcony, looking towards the valley that dipped between Pogtopia’s hill and the Green Forest.

Someone was yelling down there, getting closer and closer to the castle. It was only once they were close enough for Wilbur to see the grass moving in their wake, though, that he heard what they were saying.

“The vines!” the person—one of the guards he’d put on surveillance, Wilbur realized—screamed, tumbling towards the castle. “The vines! They’re coming now!”

No. That wasn’t possible. They still had a couple of days left! It hadn’t been a week! They’d checked the forest just that morning, and the vines had still been quite a ways off and slow-moving. There was no way—

The door behind Wilbur suddenly flung open, and both he and Tubbo whirled to see Quackity standing there, panting.

“Wilbur,” he said, chest heaving, “you better come quick.”

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Technoblade was lost.

He swung his torch to the left, illuminating yet another hallway in a seemingly endless maze of them. This castle was ridiculous. Technoblade prided himself on his keen sense of direction, but within five minutes of entering this labyrinth he'd gotten lost, and now he was aimlessly wandering, hoping to run into Phil, or Sapnap, or George, or even *Dream* ...

Okay, maybe not Dream. He wasn't *that* desperate. Not yet.

Technoblade used his torch to push back another vine. They shied away from fire, apparently, and would move back whenever Techno swung the flame too close.

What a weird plant. If he hadn't heard what it did to people who touched it, Techno might not have been afraid of it at all.

Techno skimmed his free hand along the wall. It was rough and dusty, sand trickling off in heaps as Techno ran his fingers along the stone. The ceiling above wasn't much better. It was made of tightly packed sand, with little twigs and strands of dried grass poking down through it. It didn't look particularly sturdy. If someone above him stomped down hard enough, they'd probably fall right through.

Techno ducked under a vine, reaching a four-way intersection in the maze. Each direction was equally as dark and dry looking. It was a wonder he hadn't gotten a nosebleed yet.

Techno shone his light down each path, disappointed when none of them seemed to lead to anything other than more hallways.

For prime's sake. Where was Phil when you needed him?

Just as Techno was about to say fuck it and head back the way he'd come—maybe he could at least find the stairs again—a noise to his left made his ears prick up.

“Technoblade...”

It was a voice, so quiet he could barely hear it. It sounded far away, but it was unmistakably a person speaking.

Techno started off down the hall to his left. “Phil?”

“Technoblade...” the voice rasped again.

Techno stopped at the next divide in the path, swinging his torch left and right. Who was that? It didn’t sound like Phil anymore.

“Hello?”

“This way...”

Techno spun towards the right hand hall, grip tightening around his torch. The voice sounded closer now. Closer than it should have been. He hadn’t moved that far, had he? Maybe the other person was moving too.

“It’s a trap,” a voice in his mind whispered.

“No. Follow it,” said another.

Techno frowned. What were the voices doing here, now? Normally they only showed up when he was fighting, or when he saw blood. An exception had been when Phil showed him his drawings of the bloodvines, but Technoblade thought that had been a one-time thing, a little blip, because he’d been surprised and the voices had latched on to that.

“Go, go, go,” a pair of particularly annoying voices chanted.

“Would you shut it,” Techno grumbled. Nonetheless, he took a step into the hall.

“Yesss... This way...” The echoing voice said.

“Sapnap? George? Dream?” Technoblade called out, carefully stepping past vines and swinging his torch. They were getting thicker over here. Whoever was down here had certainly gotten themselves into a predicament. “This isn’t funny. Do you need help?”

There was no direct answer from the voice, but Technoblade’s voices decided to chime in for them.

“Go left!”

“Lots of vines here...”

“Go, quick!”

Technoblade tried to ignore the way his heartbeat began to pound against his chest. He focused on putting one foot in front of the other, stepping over vines and burning others away with his torch. There were so many of them, now.

He should turn back. He shouldn’t be here. *Why were there so many?* Maybe he was getting closer to the roots. If so, shouldn’t he stop and wait for Phil and the others? Or maybe go back and guide them. This place was a maze, after all. He’d lost count of all the twists and turns he’d taken, but now he could mark his way back until he found someone. Surely, Phil was down here somewhere.

Techno made it to the end of the hall, stepping over a final vine before raising his torch and, simultaneously, his eyes.

“Technoblade, we’ve been waiting for you...”

Splitting pain exploded in his skull, and Technoblade *screamed* .

“*Red, red, red!*”

“*Oh prime.*”

“*Touch it!*”

“*Red, red, red, red...*”

Techno dropped to his knees, somehow managing to avoid the vines around him. His torch fell to the ground, rolling a few feet before catching on a vine and setting it ablaze. Technoblade was in too much pain to notice.

The voices were *screaming* . Almost all of them at once. The ones that weren’t screaming were shouting, telling him to ‘touch it,’ to run, or simply shouting the word ‘red’ over and over again at the top of their lungs.

“*Dad!*” Techno screamed, not knowing what else to do. He needed to get out. He needed this to stop.

“*Touch it and it will stop!*” a voice yelled.

“*Don’t!*” shouted another.

“*Yes!*”

“*Touch it!*”

“*Red, red, red, red.*”

“***Look up!***”

Technoblade’s head snapped up.

The first thing he saw was red, lots and lots of red, surrounding him on every side except for the one he’d come from. Crimson vines tangled and twisted in giant heaps around the edges of the room. They dangled from the ceiling, which was so covered that Techno could barely see the sandstone underneath, and coiled around and around sandstone pillars that lined the edges of the room. The room must have been a throne room at one point, but now it was so heavily infested with vines that it looked more like a snake pit.

The second thing he saw was an egg—a massive, red egg three times his size—sitting in the center of a nest of bloodvines.

Techno pushed himself back to his feet, pressing a palm against the side of his head. Prime. The world was not meant to be spinning this much, was it?

He forced himself to inhale and exhale through the screaming pain inside his mind. It hurt. It hurt so *so* badly, and all he wanted to do was curl up in a ball on the floor and pass out. But he was surrounded by brainwashing vines, and he wasn't sure where Phil or anyone else was. He'd never given in to the voices before, and he wouldn't start now.

"What do you want?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"Touch it. You know you want to."

It took Techno a second to realize the hissing voice had come from the egg.

"Swear your allegiance to me. It's easy, all you have to do is touch the vines. I can grant you things. I've *already* granted people things."

Technoblade shook his head wearily. "No."

The voice continued, "I could take your pain away. I could give you power, more power than you could ever *dream* of holding. I could satisfy your voices."

Technoblade shivered, glaring at the egg. "My voices don't need satisfying."

Even as he said it, he knew it was a lie. The voices were still screaming, still shouting almost incoherent demands inside his skull. Some were familiar—age old shrieks Techno had learned to ignore—while the rest were new.

"*Blood!*"

"*Blood for the Blood God.*"

"*Red, red, red.*"

"*Touch it!*"

The Crimson's voice seemed to know he was lying, too. "Really?" it rasped, unimpressed. "You know, all it would take to stop them is a single touch. A brush of your fingers. A nudge. A graze. Look how close your foot is already."

Technoblade looked down, and froze. A vine, large and leafy, had somehow slithered closer to him while he and the new voice were speaking. It was just inches away from his foot.

As if sensing his eyes on it, the vine stopped moving.

So did about twenty others.

Technoblade's heart raced as he realized the vines had been steadily creeping closer this whole time.

“Come on, Techno. Touch it. You could have anything you desire. Power, bloodshed, silence, a family...”

“I have a family,” Techno immediately shot back.

“Not for long.”

Technoblade’s breath caught in his chest. “What do you mean?” he asked, blood running cold when there was no immediate answer. “Hello? What do you mean!”

“Blood.”

“Violence!”

“Wilbur’s in trouble...”

“Fire!”

“Trapped.”

“Touch it!”

“Get out!”

“TNT.”

“Vines are coming!”

“Techno!”

Techno jumped. He hadn’t realized he’d been clutching his head again until someone grabbed his wrist and tried to yank it away. He instinctively went to swing at them, but froze when his eyes connected with familiar blue ones. They were wide and panicked, darting around the room before returning to Techno’s face, but they were unmistakably Phil’s.

“Phil, Phil,” Techno mindlessly repeated, relief flooding him as he took in his father’s forest green cloak and long blond hair. He grabbed onto his sleeve, clinging for dear life.

“We need to get out of here,” Phil said hurriedly. And that was when Techno realized the reason Phil kept looking around.

He must have burst in through the same tunnel Techno had come through, using his torch to burn away the vines covering it. But now they were growing back at an alarming pace, crimson bleeding life back into the blackened veins. On top of that, the fire Techno had accidentally started had spread, creeping up the walls and licking along the ceiling. The room was already growing dusty with smoke.

“We need to blow this up first!” Techno replied, glancing back at the Crimson Egg. There was no doubt in his mind that this was the root Dream had been talking about. “Where’s everyone else?”

“I don’t know! I haven’t seen anyone since I came down here!”

“Dream didn’t come down with you?”

“I don’t—I don’t think so! I came when I heard you screaming!”

“We need more TNT! This thing’s massive! I—”

Technoblade cried out as another wave of voices bombarded his mind. He distantly heard Phil calling out his name, but his father's voice was lost as the other voices scrambled over each other, fighting for dominance, before suddenly shouting with alarming clarity:

“GET OUT!”

BOOM!

Techno and Phil both froze. Even the voices shut up.

“What was that?” Phil whispered, fingers digging into Techno’s arm. Techno hardly noticed, he was gripping Phil’s sleeve right back.

“It sounded like... like—”

BOOM! CRASH! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The sound rippled down, echoing from overhead.

It sounded like explosions.

It sounded like *TNT*.

“RUN!” the voices screamed in unison.

Technoblade listened to them.

He grabbed Phil’s wrist and spun around. His free hand found his sword, and he pulled the blade out, using it to slash through the vines hurriedly growing around his feet, above his head, and over the exit. Then he ducked through it, taking off down the hall with Phil hot on his heels.

“What the fuck is happening?” Phil shouted over the sound of TNT getting closer and closer, over the hissing of the vines slithering after them, and the crackling of fire chasing them.

“I don’t know!” Technoblade yelled back. “How do we get outta here?”

“Uhhh...”

“Left!” Techno’s voices simultaneously shouted, and he turned left.

BOOM!

Techno and Phil both screamed as the ceiling above them shook, raining pebbles and sand down to the floor. Shit, shit, shit. That sounded *close* .

“Who the hell set TNT off early?” Techno screamed angrily, using his sword to slice through a few stray vines and bursting into the next intersection.

“I have an idea,” Phil muttered. Techno didn’t have a chance to respond, though.

“*Right!*” the voices yelled, and he turned accordingly.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Techno grit his teeth as the walls around them began to rattle. They weren’t going to make it. Prime, they were never getting out of here. Who the *fuck* set TNT off?

“*Right! There’s an exit!*”

Technoblade turned right, Phil right behind him. Sure enough, at the very end of the tunnel, he could see pale moonlight illuminating a doorway-sized gap in the sandstone. It was far off, though, and the TNT was so close. Could they even make it?

“A way out!” Phil cried, his hand gripping onto Techno’s arm again. Techno looked back at him momentarily, and the look on his face—eyes sparking with hope, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth—solidified it: they had to get out. Technoblade refused to die here. He refused to let *Phil* die here.

“Come on!”

Their feet pounded against the floor as they ran towards the exit. Techno had never run so fast in his life. Not when he was in the Nether, playing tag with the other kids; not when he’d run after Wilbur after his mother’s funeral, catching him around the waist and holding him while he screamed in the gardens; not even when he’d first hightailed it to Pogtopia after escaping the Nether. He ran faster and faster as the bombs came closer and closer and—

BOOM!

Technoblade screamed as a blast sounded directly behind him and the floor erupted, sending him and Phil careening towards the exit. The blast was hot, and made his ears ring, but it was the last push they needed to launch them both through the exit and onto the sand outside.

Technoblade coughed, spluttering on a mouthful of sand as he rolled over. *P rime* , that hurt. His back was going to be so sore tomorrow...

Before he could bemoan any further, someone was grabbing his arm and hoisting him back to his feet. It was Phil. Phil desperately tugged Techno upwards, yelling something that was nearly unintelligible over the ringing in his ears.

“Heh?” Techno asked, struggling to get his feet under himself.

“—astle’s about to explode! We need to run! ”

With Phil's help, Techno finally managed to stand up. And then they were running, running, running as fast as they physically could away from the castle behind them.

Techno shot one last glance over his shoulder—taking in the smooth sandstone walls, the gold-tipped roofs, and the intricately carved decals of the Crimson Castle—before the whole thing exploded.

Chapter End Notes

ayup! hope everyone's day is going well. I feel obligated to mention that this chapter also has an alternate title in my head, which is the song ["Red Red Red"](#) by Tom Rosenthal. It cracked me up the first time I heard it because it just seemed so random, but honestly it's quite the writing jam and I wrote the majority of this chapter while listening to it. ANYWAY-

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr [@youreyeslookliketheocean!!](#) <3

Youth

Chapter Summary

“On my mark,” Wilbur said, loud enough for the two guards behind him to hear and prepare to wave their flags for the other archers. “One, two—” He nocked his bow easily. “—three, four, five—” He drew back until his thumb brushed the side of his chin. “—six, seven—” He raised his elbow higher. “—eight, nine—” He aimed. “—ten.”

The weight of the kingdom was heavy on his shoulders. Was he ready to carry it? He was only eighteen.

Wilbur fired.

//

Let the battle begin :)

Chapter Notes

Song from chapter title is ["Youth"](#) by Glass Animals. It's definitely one of my favorite title songs out of the whole fic, I just think it fits well, so go check it out!

CW: mentions of abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was night, and the field was hard to see, but Wilbur had no doubt he could hit his target.

He was positioned on the edge of the tallest guard tower, a wooden roof and railing caging him inside the small octagonal structure. The guard towers had been constructed years ago, but Wilbur couldn't recall a single instance of them being used before now. The wooden beams holding up the roof had gotten rickety from neglect, and the ladder Wilbur had climbed to get onto the platform was horribly creaky. Nonetheless, they did their job.

From here, Wilbur could see the edge of the field just across the valley sloping in front of him. It was a bit of a long shot—at least half a mile long, really—but the tower was so high up that he knew he could make it.

Did he want to make it, though?

Wilbur allowed his gaze to rake over the valley. This was his home, the land he'd grown up on and the fields he'd called his. There was the spot in the gardens where he'd laid with Techno all those days ago. There was another, where Techno had caught him around the

middle and held him while he sobbed after his mom's funeral. There was the spot he'd watched Techno and Tommy duel, and the fountain where he and Tommy had thrown stones.

Wilbur closed his eyes and exhaled.

There were nine other guards positioned in towers just like his. Two guards stood behind him now. All of them were waiting on his command.

He pushed his crown back into place, and dipped the tip of his arrow into gasoline. It dribbled across the wooden platform as Wilbur extended it toward one of the guards behind him, who lit it. Then, he turned back to the fields.

He'd decided not to use his mother's bow for this, but this bow—a sturdy, practice one he used often—had the same heavy weight in his hands.

Like he'd taught Tommy to do that day in the Green Forest, Wilbur spaced his feet evenly apart. He looked up, locking eyes on the strip of grass they'd coated in gasoline just minutes prior.

“On my mark,” Wilbur said, loud enough for the two guards behind him to hear and prepare to wave their flags for the other archers. “One, two—” He nocked his bow easily. “—three, four, five—” He drew back until his thumb brushed the side of his chin. “—six, seven—” He raised his elbow higher. “—eight, nine—” He aimed.

“—ten.”

The weight of the kingdom was heavy on his shoulders. Was he ready to carry it? He was only eighteen.

Wilbur fired.

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Phil was not just angry, he was *pissed*. His teeth ground together so hard he swore he was going to knock one loose, but there was barely time to worry about that when the Crimson Castle had just blown up behind them.

Phil stumbled through the sand back towards where they'd left their horses and supplies. They'd purposefully left everything far from the castle and the vines that surrounded it, but the vines around them were racing nearly as fast as they were, now. And more kept growing.

Up from the sand, out from preexisting vines—crimson kept spreading. It was like the TNT had set them off, and now they were popping up faster and faster. Phil leapt over a particularly large vine, thanking prime when it didn't snag his ankle and pull him back down.

“How the hell did it go off early!” Technoblade yelled, following behind him.

“Someone must have set it off,” Phil replied, skipping over a few more vines. It was terrifying to know that if he touched a single one, it was over for him.

“I think it made that egg thing angry,” Techno said, huffing, “‘cause these vines were *not* growin’ this fast before.”

“What even was that thing?”

“I don’t know. Did you hear it, though?”

“Hear it?” Phil shot a glance back over his shoulder. Techno was still following deftly behind, but his brow was pinched, and his eyes were troubled when they connected with Phil’s.

“Yeah. It was talking to me.”

Phil frowned. He hadn’t heard anything. Well, except for the vines, and some weird hissing, and the fire crackling, and then the TNT... “I didn’t hear anything, mate.”

Technoblade’s frown deepened, but there wasn’t time to talk about it any further. Phil could see their supplies, now, resting on the top of a sand dune. The vines were slithering towards it, gaining speed.

“Dream’s stuff is gone,” Techno observed angrily. “That green bastard...”

He was right. As they made it to the sand dune and scrambled up its side, Phil realized Dream’s stuff *was* gone, along with Sapnap and George’s. Shit. Phil had had his suspicions about who had set off the TNT, but this was confirmation.

After their argument earlier, Dream had tried to *kill them*. That green son of a—

“We have to get back to Pogtopia,” Phil said, starting to adjust his saddle. “I don’t know about Sapnap and George, but Dream must have left right after I argued with him. He’s got a fast horse when he’s not weighed down by George and Sapnap pulling the supplies. He could already be halfway there.”

“You argued with Dream?”

Phil looked up, catching Techno’s eye. “Yeah. He lied about not wanting Pogtopia, Techno. He still wants it, and apparently is prepared to do anything to get it.” Phil struggled with the clasp on one of his bags until it ripped open. Feathers—the wings he’d made—spilled out. He gathered the contraption into his arms and started slinging it on as he continued talking. “He told me he knew we had Tommy, and then threatened to use him as blackmail against us. Speaking of which—” Phil’s eyes narrowed. “—why didn’t you *tell* me?”

Techno stood there, gaping. “Wha—He has Tommy?”

“Not yet,” Phil said. He shoved his arm through the second strap.

“He... He can’t. How did he know he was with us?” Techno asked.

“I don’t know. But you didn’t answer my question.”

The vines were getting closer. Phil could hear them hissing up the side of the sand dune, steadily creeping closer and closer to their little refuge. They needed to go.

He tied the leather straps over his chest, yanking until they were tight.

“I— Wilbur told me not to tell you Tommy was Dream’s kid. He didn’t want to break his trust, because Tommy didn’t want you to know, because... Phil, he’s bein’ abused back there! We can’t let Dream take him back!” Something akin to desperation bled into Techno’s voice and made it crack on the last syllable.

It had been a while since Phil had heard his son this upset. In fact, the last time he could recall seeing Techno so desperate had to be the day he’d arrived on his front doorstep—eleven years old, soaked and shivering from the rain—practically begging to be let inside. Back then, he’d been a short scrawny kid with frizzy pink hair and a toothless grin. Now he was nineteen, eight years older than he’d been, but the look on his face was the same.

Techno didn’t wait longer than a second for Phil to respond. He turned away, placing one foot onto Carl’s stirrup and swinging himself into the saddle. He took the reins in his hands, gripping them tightly and turning Carl back North, towards Pogtopia. Only then did he look back down at Phil.

“Please, Phil,” he said. “We can’t let Dream take him. I know he’s his kid and all, but you shoulda’ seen him. He’s terrified of him. He looked like how I felt livin’ in the Nether. So... so I don’t care what you think, but I’m goin’ back to stop Dream from getting him.”

Techno’s hands were turning white from how hard he gripped the reins, but a determined glint had sparked in his eyes. That’s when Phil realized what his son thought. Techno thought Phil was going to send Tommy back after learning he was Dream’s son.

Maybe, on a normal occasion, he’d have been right. But after hearing Dream argue earlier, after seeing the cold look in the man’s eyes, after almost being blown up by him, and *especially* after having Techno confirm his suspicions about Tommy’s abuse, Phil was not about to let Dream anywhere near the kid.

Phil slid his hands into the pulley system of his wings. “Techno,” he said, and his son automatically stiffened. “We better hurry if we want to make it back to Pogtopia before that green bastard.”

A corner of Techno’s mouth twitched upwards, and then half, and then he was full out grinning. His grip on the reins relaxed. “Thank prime. I thought I was gonna have’ta fight you off.”

“Pfft. Like you’d win against me anyway.”

“I would and you know it.”

Phil laughed and, for a split second, it was as if nothing had changed—as if they were back at the castle again, joking and laughing over dinner. Then Phil heard the slithering sound of the vines stretching closer, and he was forcefully slammed back into the present.

He turned back to his wings, clumsily adjusting the straps around his arms before stretching them out and tugging on his pulley. Like he'd designed them to, the wings straightened out. The feathers extended like a real bird's.

“What are you doin’ with those?” Techno asked.

Phil stretched the pulley tighter and raised his arms. “Well, hopefully, I’m outrunning Dream,” he said right before the wind caught his feathers and he leapt upwards, following it.

The sand dune was by no means tall. Phil would have much preferred testing the wings out on a tall tree, first. But it was enough for the wind to catch him, for him to tilt and yank the pulleys until they were fully extended, and then—against all odds—Phil was flying.

He laughed as the wind lifted him up another few feet. From here, he could see the waves of sand rippling up and down across the desert. He could see the vines crossing over each other behind him, and Techno below. More than that, he could see the night sky—wide and open and limitless.

Phil looked down again, catching Techno’s dumbstruck expression. He laughed.

“Come on!” he called down, unable to wipe the stupid grin off his face. “Combat waits for no man, right?”

Techno rolled his eyes, but a fond smile accompanied it. “Yeah, yeah,” he said.

And then, just as the vines coiled over the top of the sand dune, they were off.

Flying was harder than originally anticipated. Mostly, it was the wind’s fault. Any time the breeze died down, Phil would start to descend. It wasn’t really a problem so long as he used the windier moments to lift himself up again, but if a moment like that didn’t come for over a minute, Phil found himself skimming trees and trying desperately not to get caught in one.

At least he’d made it to the Green Forest.

The green trees below seemed to shimmer in the rising sun as Phil glided over them. It was almost like watching the ocean. The leaves rippled like water, and every once in a while a bird would arc out of them, joining Phil in the sky before gliding back down.

The sunrise tinted Phil’s skin pink as he drifted higher up. It was still so early—probably only five or six in the morning. He wondered if Wil was up yet. Probably not. His second eldest son liked his sleep.

He’d passed up his eldest, Techno, a while back. Carl was fast, but there was no keeping up with someone who could literally fly. Phil doubted Techno minded that he’d left him behind, though. They were both just trying to get back to Pogtopia as quickly as possible; it didn’t matter who got there first.

With a tug, Phil extended his wings further. He swooped upwards, riding off of the wind as it lifted him higher.

He'd never felt quite like this before: free, limitless, and untethered. It was almost the feeling he got while traveling—like he was both infinitely big and infinitely small at the same time, like the universe was his to explore. But this, this was even more. This was adrenaline and exhilaration, joy and fear, careful calculation and reckless leaps of faith. This, Phil thought, was what it felt like to be young again.

The wind tapered off, allowing Phil a few moments of peaceful gliding before he started descending downwards. He hummed to himself as he stayed there, floating along and taking in all the scenery. Pogtopia should have been getting close. He'd been flying for quite a few hours.

Just as the thought popped into his head, Phil's eye caught on something up ahead. It looked like... smoke? Thin clouds of it obscured the forest ahead, steadily trickling closer and closer to Phil.

Phil frowned, swooping closer to it. Was there a forest fire?

And that's when he saw it—the first golden spire of Pogtopia's castle, extending up from behind the layer of smog. His heart leapt into his throat, first with joy upon finally arriving home, and then in fear as he realized the smoke was coming from the valley in Pogtopia.

There were two possible explanations for this, Phil thought. Either a wildfire really *had* started, or Wilbur had been forced to light the fields. But why would he? The vines weren't supposed to be there for another couple days, and shouldn't he have written Phil first? Unless he had, and Phil had left before the letter could be delivered. And the vines... they'd started growing faster once the TNT went off, hadn't they.

Suddenly, Phil felt his infiniteness turn finite again. Panic squeezed his chest as he flew lower, skimming just above the smoke to get a bird's eye view of the scene. When he'd passed enough of it for the fields to be visible, Phil gasped.

The edge of the field was on fire. The flames cut off just before the river, but the fire was slowly burning, slinking closer and closer as it ate up more and more of the dry summer grass. Worse than that, though, was the tangle of vines that had slunk their way through the valley and entered the fields. The fire held off most of them, but there were so many. Some of the bigger ones continued through the flames and ran like veins through the golden field.

How had Phil missed those when he flew over the forest? The vines must have been on the ground below the trees, and he hadn't seen.

Before he could even begin to berate himself, his eyes caught on something else below him. People. There were people in the grass, swinging swords and aiming bows as they advanced into Pogtopia's territory. They were met, consistently, by other soldiers wearing Pogtopia's crest on their sleeves. But upon seeing them, Phil's heart nearly stopped.

Phil hadn't just flown into his homeland.

He'd flown into a battlefield.

Chapter End Notes

KINDA IMPORTANT INFO!! I just moved back to university for the semester and am already drowning in homework, so updates here will be coming MUCH less frequently. My goal was to finish posting everything by early September, but school unfortunately comes first for me so it might just not be a realistic goal anymore. That said, thank you all so much for the support and I'm very excited to finish uploading this story as soon as I can!! Also, anyone notice the reference to Ghostbur's counting to 10 (right before he died) in the first scene? :)

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

The Truth Is a Cave

Chapter Summary

A smile cracked across Dream's face as he stepped inside. The castle door closed with a quiet click behind him.

"Hi, Tommy," he said. "Long time no see."

//

aka the chapter where shit goes down and lots of confrontations occur

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is ["The Truth Is a Cave"](#) by The Oh Hellos! This is another one of the songs I thought fit the plot really well, so go check it out! (Plus it's just super pretty :))

CW: panic attacks, mentions of abuse, violence

((ALSO, big disclaimer, I have literally nothing against Dream. I feel like I shouldn't even have to say this, but just to make sure no one takes anything in this fic the wrong way, c!Dream is a CHARACTER. He's a lovely person irl, and I just really enjoy his villain potential in the SMP and wanted to build on that in this au. Okay. Just throwing this out there. Happy reading!))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Tommy's eyes finally fluttered open, they were met with the guest bedroom's ceiling.

He yawned, rolling over and rubbing the sleep from his eyes. When had he fallen asleep? The last thing he remembered was laying out on the balcony with Wilbur and Tubbo, listening to Cat, and then...

Tommy sighed. Pale pink light was streaming in through his window, but it was dim. It was still early. The sun hadn't fully risen yet, and Tommy was tired. So, with those two thoughts in mind, he rolled back over and attempted to fall back asleep.

Attempted .

Tommy frowned as the sound of muffled shouting met his ears. He sat up and held completely still, waiting for it to come again.

He didn't have to wait long. Now that he was listening, he realized the shouting was coming continuously from outside the castle. It wasn't just one person, either. It sounded like the whole army was out there, yelling and... and fighting?

Tommy flung back his covers, practically leaping the three feet between his bed and the window. He pushed back the curtains, and peered out at the field.

What the fuck.

The field was on fire. It wasn't super obvious from where Tommy was, but he could see the smoke billowing up from beyond the hill. On top of that, he could see soldiers out there—blades and arrow-tips flashing in the rose-colored sunlight as they fought each other.

What the fuck.

Tommy scrambled away from the window. He jammed his old shoes onto his feet, not bothering to tie them as he raced out the bedroom door.

Wilbur had started fighting? When? Why? *Without him?*

Tommy skid down the hallway, nearly tripping over his own feet as he threw open the doors and entered the foyer. He thundered down the main staircase, making a beeline for the front doors.

If Wilbur had truly lit the fields, Tommy knew where he'd be. Phil had planned this all out, and Wilbur had told Tommy everything about it. If he'd just recently lit the fields, he'd still be up in the main guard tower to oversee it. If not, he could be in any one of the towers, shooting off arrows to ward off the bloodvines' army. The question then would be, which tower?

Tommy's sneakers squeaked on the marble floor as he ran towards the front doors.

That fucking bitch had started fighting without him! He hadn't even bothered to wake him up! He was so fucking irritating and stupid and dumb and—

Tommy flung open the front door, adrenaline making it easier than it normally would have been, and immediately ran headfirst into someone.

Tommy yelped, stumbling back and landing hard on the floor.

"Oi! Watch it, dickhead! Where's Wilb—" Tommy cut himself off with a choked breath as he looked up, and right into Dream's bright green eyes.

No. *No, no, no, no.* Dream wasn't supposed to be here. Wilbur said Phil would be the one to get here first after receiving his letter; he wouldn't wait on the others to haul the supplies back. Dream shouldn't have been here. He shouldn't— He couldn't— And now he'd found him—

Tommy sucked in a wheezing inhale. "No..."

A smile cracked across Dream's face as he stepped inside. The castle door closed with a quiet click behind him.

"Hi, Tommy," he said. "Long time no see."

Phil knew his son like he knew the back of his own hand. He'd memorized the waves in Wilbur's golden-brown hair when he was only seven, sitting outside in the gardens and poking at frogs. He'd learned the way he walked when he heard footsteps pad past his office door at midnight. He knew the way Wil smiled, bright and brilliantly, like the sun, and the way he laughed when he teased Techno. He knew the serious Wilbur, who frowned and knit his eyebrows together over math equations, and he knew the silly Wilbur who'd knocked out his first tooth while dancing around the kitchen. He knew Wilbur in grief and he knew Wilbur in joy. He could single his son out in a battlefield.

And he had. Phil tilted his wings forward ever so slightly, aiming for the guard tower where he'd spotted Wilbur's shining crown and mop of brown hair. Someone was up there with him. No. *Two* someones. One of them was shorter—black hair under a silver guard helmet, sleeves rolled up to his elbows—that was Quackity. The other was in between the two, with messy brown hair and some armor Phil didn't recognize. Shit. Was that someone from the bloodvines' army?

Phil pulled his wings in slightly, dipping into a dive towards Wilbur's tower. The platform was wide open; he could definitely fly through. Easy. No problem. Absolutely—

Oh shit, he was not going to make it.

Phil let out an inhuman screech as he pulled upwards just in time to save himself from crashing into the side of the tower. His foot caught on the wooden railing, sending him tumbling through the open window and across the wooden floor. He groaned as he rolled to a stop.

Fucking hell. He was definitely not as young as he used to be. That was going to hurt the next morning.

“Dad?”

Phil sat up, giving a quick tug on his wings. They extended slightly, feathers ruffled but still functional. Thank prime.

Exhaling a breath of relief, Phil looked up. There was Wilbur, staring at him with the widest brown eyes he'd ever seen, mouth hanging half-open. Then there was Quackity next to him, looking similarly stunned, and the last boy between them sporting a shit-eating smile.

“*Holy shit,*” the boy said, pointing at Phil's wings, “those are *sick*, dude. Did you make them yourself?”

Phil didn't respond, but that was fine, because Wilbur barely gave him a chance to. In an instant, he'd dropped the bow he'd been holding and was helping Phil to his feet.

“Dad,” he said, gripping Phil’s hands hard enough to leave white marks, “ *Dad* .”

“Why didn’t you write me?” Phil asked, instinctively pulling Wilbur into a tight hug.

Over his son’s shoulder he could see the battlefield. Swords clashed left and right. People were shouting and screaming—some angry, some terrified. There were *so many* of them. Phil had never seen so many soldiers. There was no way all of those were his, right?

Phil was broken from his pondering by Wilbur forcefully pulling back.

“What?” Wil exclaimed. “I did write you! Days ago!”

Now it was Phil’s turn to be surprised. “What? No you didn’t! I never got anything!”

“Yes you did! The messenger said he gave it to you! How else did you know to come back?”

“I—I didn’t! Dream—” Phil’s eyes widened. “Where’s Tommy?”

“Inside. He was asleep when this started, so I put him in his room. Why? What happened? Where’s Techno?”

Phil scrambled back, heading for the ladder down. “Don’t worry about it. I need to go check something, but you...” Phil looked back at his son and paused. Wilbur was standing there looking utterly lost, eyes wide and panicked. His hands, resting by his sides for now, were shaking.

Guilt pierced Phil like an arrow. He should have been here. If he’d known sooner, he would have returned in a heartbeat.

Why hadn’t he gotten Wil’s letter? If the messenger said it had been delivered, but Phil never got it, then... who did?

Phil swallowed, setting all those questions aside for the moment. He crossed the wooden platform again to place a hand on his son’s shoulder.

“Are you okay?” he asked first. “What do you need?”

Wilbur nodded slowly. “I’m okay. I’m...” He glanced back at the field. “—overwhelmed, but okay. We got Tubbo here, and his army.” He gestured to the brown-haired boy beside him, and Phil finally recognized him.

Tubbo had grown since the last time Phil saw him. He was taller. His face had thinned out, and he held himself with the composure of a king. Phil supposed that should have been expected, seeing as Tubbo was the king of Snowchester now. Still, he couldn’t help but be surprised.

“He’s helped us out a lot. We trained almost everyone from the village. Of course, Techno probably could have done a better job teaching, but—” Wilbur turned back to the opening between the roof and the railing. A bittersweet expression flickered across his face. “—they’re holding their own out there, I’d say.”

Wilbur's eyes suddenly widened, and he snagged his bow, aimed, and fired an arrow faster than Phil could blink. When he turned back, the expression from before was gone.

"Listen," Phil said, taking a step closer again. "I am so, so, so sorry. I don't know what happened to the letter you sent, but I never received it. If I had, I would have come back immediately."

Wilbur nodded. He bit his lip and glanced back towards the fields. "I know," he said quietly.

It wasn't enough. Phil placed both of his hands on Wilbur's shoulders again. "Wil. Wilbur, look at me."

Wilbur turned to him.

"I am so, so, *so* proud of you," Phil said, trying to bleed every last drop of his love and pride into the statement. "You did exactly what I would have done if I was here, okay? I think... I think we may have sped up the vines. Out in the Badlands. It was our fault. You've done amazing, and I am so proud of you."

Wilbur's shoulders relaxed under his hands, and only once his son cracked a small smile did Phil pull back and head for the ladder again. Quackity and Tubbo had returned to their posts at the balcony minutes ago, and were firing arrows down upon the bloodvines' army.

"I'll be right back," Phil said, pulling the heavy trapdoor open and climbing inside. "I have to find Tommy."

"Why? What's going on?" Wilbur asked, but Phil had already slipped down the ladder, closing the trapdoor behind him.

As he hurried down the rungs, he heard Tubbo and Quackity both calling for Wilbur's help with the bows. Good. Phil didn't need Wilbur to follow him now.

Phil unlatched and pushed through the heavy wooden door at the bottom of the tower, taking off in a sprint across the grass toward the castle gates.

Dream had messed with the wrong family.

—»-»-»-»-»-—

Tommy scrambled backwards on the marble floor as Dream strode closer.

"No," he repeated, eyes widening as Dream got closer, and closer, and then Dream was bending down and grabbing his wrist—the one he'd hurt, before, that had slowly been getting better—and yanking him to his feet, and Tommy was frozen. Oh prime, he was frozen.

“Tommy,” Dream said in that sickly sweet, reprimanding tone Tommy had always hated, “did you really think I wouldn’t find you?”

Tommy didn’t respond. His mouth felt like it was full of cotton. It was hard to swallow, much less speak. Especially when Dream placed his other hand on his shoulder, fingers digging in just enough to be painful.

“I’m so sorry these awful people kept you here. But it’ll be okay now. We can go home.”

What? No!

Tommy tried to pull his wrist free, but Dream’s grip tightened and, instead of getting away, he found himself being tugged along towards the front doors.

“Spirit’s out there, waiting,” Dream explained as he dragged Tommy along. “We can be out of here and home in about half an hour. Of course—” Dream sighed. “—I’ll have to punish you for leaving the castle grounds. You were supposed to stay in your room.”

Tommy’s chest tightened again. “D-Dream,” he stammered out, fighting the feeling of a hundred rubber bands tightening around his chest, “I’m sorry. I— I really—”

With unexpected force, Dream whirled back around. Before Tommy had a chance to even realize what was happening, something hot collided with the side of his cheek and he staggered to the side, tripping over his own feet and somehow winding up on the floor again. He winced as he sat up, pressing a hand to his stinging cheek.

Dream had just *hit* him.

Tears welled up in Tommy’s eyes. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to leave the castle I just— The vines were outside— And— And the doors were open and—”

“That’s no excuse!” Dream shouted. “Tommy, you know better!”

Tommy did know better. He knew he shouldn’t have left. *Why did he leave?*

“Besides, who’s going to care about you out here?” Dream continued. Tommy scrambled to his feet and backed away as Dream advanced, still shouting. “You’re a nuisance! You don’t listen, you’re dramatic, you’re manipulative... What did you tell them to get them to let you stay here? Huh? I bet you lied, didn’t you.”

Tommy’s cheek burned as he clutched it. He could feel the tears slip between his fingers as he backed up. He *had* lied, technically. He’d lied about not having any family, because Dream had adopted him years ago and he’d lied about not being with him anymore. He hadn’t lied about where he came from, but he hadn’t really told anyone the truth, either. He’d lied by omission.

Something in his face must have shown this, because Dream smiled self-satisfactorily right as Tommy’s back collided with one of the foyer’s knight statues. He was pinned.

Dream was so close, Tommy could hear him breathing. Or maybe that was his own breathing. He wasn't sure.

"Tommy," Dream said, voice softening, "I care about you, okay? I just want what's best for you. What do you think will happen if you stay here longer? They'll get tired of dealing with you at some point, won't they? They'll throw you out. Leave you alone. And by that point it'll be too late to come crawling back to me."

Tommy felt another tear slip past his fingers. His skin burned; Dream had really hit him hard.

"W-why do you—" Tommy choked back tears. "—Why do you hate me so much?"

"I don't hate you," Dream said, eyebrows raising. "Did they tell you that? See. I told you they weren't good people. I *care* about you, Tommy."

"Tommy, people who care about you don't try to hurt you."

Tommy blinked as Wilbur's words echoed through his head.

Wilbur was a good person. He was the one who'd taken Tommy out to the gardens. Who'd taught him to shoot a bow. Who'd laughed and cracked jokes over dinner, and let Tommy into his office even when he was busy. He'd wrapped Tommy's wrist up to help heal it. He'd been taking time out of his days to teach Tommy to read—something Tommy had wanted to do forever—simply because Tommy wanted to learn. He'd been the one to hold him after he'd been locked inside the cabinet, hiding from Dream.

Most importantly, Wilbur had never—not once—tried to hurt Tommy. Neither had Technoblade. Neither had Phil.

Dream had.

And, suddenly, Tommy couldn't think of a single reason why he should go with Dream.

"Come on," Dream said, reaching for Tommy's hand again. But Tommy wasn't frozen anymore.

He reached behind him, knocking the iron sword from the statue's grip and taking it in his own. In a flash, he had it out in front of him and pointed at Dream.

The lessons with Techno had paid off.

"No," Tommy said.

Dream took a wary step back, eyes flicking curiously between the blade and Tommy's face. He hadn't expected resistance, Tommy supposed. And why should he have? Tommy had always listened to him before. He'd allowed Dream to push him around, to hurt him, for practically his whole life—he hadn't known any better.

But now he did. Now he knew the difference between a warm smile and a cold one. He knew hugs and assurances when he was scared. He knew patient fingers guiding him across pages of words, and sparring matches with wide open gaps and waxed over swords so there was no risk of getting hurt. He knew gentle hands helping to nock a bow, and teasing laughter that never let a joke be pushed too far.

For the first time in his life, Tommy thought, he knew what a home was supposed to feel like. And Dream had never felt like that.

“What do you mean ‘no’?”

“I mean exactly what I said,” Tommy replied, lifting his sword an inch higher. “*No*. I don’t even care if they kick me out. They could toss me out like a piece of fuckin’ rubbish, and I still wouldn’t go back to you.”

“Wha—? Tommy. I took care of you for eight years!”

“Took *care* of me? You locked me in my room half the time! You ignored me! You... you *hurt* me! If you call taking care of someone hitting them, and threatening them, and then... then... then *manipulating* them into submission by pretending to care every once in a while, then—”

“Tommy—”

“Shut the fuck up! I don’t want to hear it!” Tommy practically screamed. His voice echoed off the foyer ceiling. “You know the biggest difference between them and you? The biggest difference is that they make me feel... feel *safe*, and *important*, and you made me feel like I was walking around fuckin’ TNT all the time. I could never do anything right. I could never do anything at all.”

Dream laughed suddenly, causing Tommy to stop talking. The man reached down to his waist, pulling back his cloak. With a graceful swish even Technoblade would have admired, Dream pulled Nightmare from its sheath.

Tommy’s eyes widened. Fuck. He’d gone too far.

Dream had never hit him with an actual weapon before. He’d teased him with them, for sure, but he’d never actually pulled out a weapon with the intent to physically hurt Tommy with it.

Now, though, there was a maniacal gleam to Dream’s eyes as he brandished Nightmare in front of him. Purple light reflected off the blade—the sword’s enchantment—and Tommy took a tiny step back.

“You’ve really done it this time, Thomas,” Dream said.

The use of Tommy’s full first name sent chills down his spine, but he forced himself not to flinch. He narrowed his eyes at Dream, instead, and gripped his sword the way Techno had taught him to. He spread his legs apart, bracing.

Techno had told him it helped to think that he was fighting *for* something, the first time they’d sparred. Back then, Tommy knew what he’d been fighting for. It was the same thing

he was fighting for now. Freedom. Safety. *Himself*.

Dream's blade came down quicker than Tommy anticipated, but he still managed to block it. He grit his teeth as their blades *shiiiiing* ed off of each other before coming back for another hit.

Right foot forward, Tommy instructed himself, remembering from his lessons. *Bend your knees*. *Eyes up!*

He managed to push away from the statue he'd been pinned against, battling Dream into the middle of the foyer. Dream swung his blade down, and Tommy blocked. Dream's blade circled his and attempted to push it out of his hand, but Tommy held firm. He quickly spun around and swung his sword out again.

Dream hadn't been prepared for that. He just barely managed to block Tommy's blow, a grunt escaping his mouth when their blades connected.

"This isn't doing anything, Tommy," Dream said. Their swords glanced off of each other again. "You're really going to make me fight you like this? You're going to make a fool of yourself."

"Really? Because I think I'm doing pretty well," Tommy said breathlessly, ducking just in time for Dream's sword to swish over his head. Before he could pop back up, though, Dream's sword swung down. He raised his own to block it, and found himself trapped in the same position Techno had held him in before. Well fuck. At least he knew how to get out of it, now.

Dream pressed down against Tommy's blade, a wicked smile on his face. "See. I told you. You—"

Tommy spun out, pushing his blade up and to the side as hard as he could, and straightened one leg beneath him. Both actions did what he intended. His blade pushed Dream's up just enough that it missed his shoulder as he spun, and his leg collided with Dream's ankles, sending him toppling to the floor.

Tommy popped up, quickly kicking Nightmare across the floor. Its tip collided with the front door—firmly sticking into the dark brown wood. When Tommy turned back, Dream was still on the ground staring up at him.

He'd done it. He'd gone up against Dream, for real, and won!

He could have cried from the relief that swept over him, but he didn't. Instead, he stood taller and pointed his sword at Dream's chest.

"Leave," he demanded.

"Tommy," Dream started, using that prime-awful tone of voice again, "you don't want to do this. Don't you see what's going on outside? They can't protect you from this."

“Where are Phil and Technoblade?” Tommy asked, ignoring Dream’s previous statement in favor of shoving his blade further towards Dream’s neck. “If you’re back, they must be here somewhere.”

For a moment, Dream’s face remained completely expressionless. Then, slowly, a grin spread across his face. He laughed.

“Oh, Tommy,” he said. “They won’t be coming back.”

Tommy froze. “What? What do you mean?”

Dream shifted on the ground, propping himself up on both elbows. “We went to the root of the bloodvines in the Badlands to try and blow it up, but Phil or Techno must have set their TNT off early, because the castle exploded while we were all down there. It’s a miracle Sapnap, George and I escaped.” He cocked his head to one side, a sympathetic smile tugging at his lips. “They’re dead, Tommy.”

No. *No* .

Tommy felt his heart plummet into his stomach.

“They... they can’t be dead. You got out, so they must’ve too...”

Dream shook his head, sitting up further. “We checked all around. They weren’t there. Even if they were, the vines down there would have gotten to them by now. There were so many of them.”

“No. No!”

“Tommy,” Dream said, sympathy bleeding into his voice. Tommy couldn’t tell if it was real or not, anymore.

Fuck. *Fuck* . They weren’t dead. They couldn’t be dead, because if they were dead, wasn’t it partially his fault? He’d been the one to warn them about the vines. If he hadn’t, maybe they wouldn’t have called Dream, wouldn’t have gone to the Badlands, wouldn’t have blown up TNT and gotten trapped or smashed or...

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, sword lowering from Dream’s throat.

How could the TNT have gone off early? Who’d lit it? Phil was always so careful and calculated, and Techno as well. It was hard to imagine that a single slip up had caused their... their...

Before Tommy could finish that thought, his sword was yanked from his hand.

His eyes flew open.

Dream stood in front of him, Tommy’s sword held between the palms of his hands. With a practiced toss, Dream flipped the sword so it was the right way around. At the same time, he

stepped forward, grabbed Tommy's shoulder, and pinned him to his chest. He raised the blade to Tommy's throat.

"Come with me, or I will kill you," Dream whispered.

Tommy whimpered.

"I'm doing this for your own good, Tommy," Dream continued, beginning to walk Tommy towards the castle doors again. "You see? These people can't even take care of themselves. They're irresponsible and will only wind up hurting you in the end. I want to protect you."

They were getting close to the doors now. Another few steps and Tommy would have been able to bend down and yank Nightmare from the door if not for Dream pinning him by the neck.

Maybe he should have at least tried. The sword was tantalizingly close, and maybe he could have pulled it out with his foot. Kicked it up into his hand. Done *something*. But, to be honest, all Tommy could focus on in that moment was the fact that Wilbur never, ever, in a hundred-million years, would have done this to him.

Neither would Techno. He didn't even think Phil—

The doors flung open before Dream could reach them.

Light burst through the entrance, silhouetting the person standing there. They were holding a sword—one of the army swords, plain and silver—and their dark green cloak rippled around them—torn and dirtied. The thing that drew Tommy's eye most, though, was the fact that this person appeared to have *wings*. Pitch black wings extended out from the person's back, raising predatorily as the person reached up and pushed their hat back from their eyes.

Tommy's heart pounded in disbelief as familiar, light blue eyes connected with his before flicking to Dream.

"Dream," Phil said, voice eerily low as he stepped over the threshold and into the palace, "what do you think you're doing?"

As if Phil had pulled an invisible string, the blade lowered from Tommy's neck and Dream let him go. Tommy stumbled away and rubbed his throat. Dream hadn't so much as nicked him, but he could still feel the phantom chill of the blade held up against his skin.

Phil was alive?

"Philza," Dream greeted with a chuckle. "Figures you'd show up right as I was about to leave."

Phil stepped further forward, and Tommy staggered to the side, quickly getting out of his way.

"You're not taking Tommy," Phil said. "Not after what you tried to do to me and Techno."

“He’s my son, Philza. By law, you have to let him go with me.”

“Not if I have reason to believe that you’ve been abusing and neglecting him.”

Dream’s mouth popped open. He turned to Tommy, but before he could say anything, Phil continued.

“Obviously, Tommy can’t be completely removed from your custody yet. But if he chooses to take up a court case against you, he is required by law to live away from you until the case is closed.”

Phil tossed his sword up, letting it do a full 360 in the air before catching it in his other hand. “I read up when I adopted Techno,” he explained with a small smile. “Just in case.”

Tommy watched, shell-shocked, as the two men stared each other down. Him? Taking Dream to court? He’d never even seen a courtroom before. The closest he’d gotten was the inside of one of Dream’s gigantic meeting halls. Or maybe the throne room here. They were about equal in size.

“So what are you gonna do? Keep him here with you?” Dream asked, brandishing his own sword.

“Only if that’s where he wants to be,” Phil replied easily. The two started circling each other, swords held steadily in front of them.

“You won’t win,” Dream said. “I haven’t done anything to Tommy.”

“Well, we’ll have to let Tommy answer that,” Phil said, sparing Tommy a quick glance, “but I’m pretty sure the court will be on his side once I mention the fact that you also tried to murder Techno and I. Don’t pretend it wasn’t you who set off that TNT.”

Dream laughed. “You have no evidence to prove that.”

“I have a witness. Techno was with me.”

For a moment, no one said anything. Dream and Phil continued to circle each other in the middle of the foyer, and Tommy shifted uncomfortably off to the side. Nightmare was still firmly lodged in the door. Should he go get it?

“Remember that favor I asked you for?” Dream asked suddenly. “I want Tommy back.”

Phil’s eyes flicked quickly between Dream and Tommy again. Then, before anyone could say anything else, he stepped in front of Tommy and covered him with his wings.

“The agreement was that if you helped us, I’d owe you something. But if you tried anything—messed with my land or, more importantly, my *people*—” Phil’s wing raised higher, protectively shielding Tommy from the shoulders down. “—you’d have more than just the vines to worry about. I don’t owe you anything, Dream. And neither does Tommy. I don’t care if he’s not legally my family. Wilbur cares about him. Techno cares about him. *I* care about him.”

Tommy blinked, peeking up at Phil's face from over his wing.

Realistically, he knew Wilbur cared about him. Even Techno, he supposed, seemed to care about him to an extent. But Phil... He'd never quite given Phil a reason to care about him. With Wilbur he'd formed a friendship and offered to catch spiders for him. With Techno he'd given him a new sparring partner and pupil. But Phil... With Phil all he'd brought him was information, and he'd already given it all away. He'd told him everything he knew about the bloodvines that first night. Phil didn't need to care about him anymore.

But he did.

And he wasn't sending Tommy away, either. He'd learned that he was Dream's son, and still wasn't making him go back. He was fighting for him.

Tommy had never had someone fight for him before.

Phil turned his head to look at him, quickly gesturing towards the front door. "Go. Get out of here and find Wil. I can take care of Dream."

Tommy didn't know what else to do. Dream's eyes were on him—he could feel them burning into his skull. He was sweaty and shaking and more than a little uncomfortable, and, for the first time, he realized he trusted Phil. If Phil told him to do something, he wasn't going to argue. Especially when that something involved getting away from Dream.

He nodded before stumbling away towards the front doors. He grabbed Nightmare on his way out, ignoring the sound of Dream shouting behind him as he pulled the blade from the wood and then slipped through the door. It closed behind him, and then he was outside, alone, but free.

The rubber bands around his chest had loosened enough that he could finally get in a full inhale, so he did. He took a big, gasping inhale—sucking in the smell of wildflowers and fire—and then let it out in a shaky breath.

His hands were trembling. His fingers were slick around the sword's flashing handle, and when he reached up to wipe his face, he realized he hadn't been sweating—he'd been crying. His wrist was pulsing with pain from when Dream had yanked it. But there wasn't time to think about that now.

He squinted out past the castle gates. It was a battlefield out there. Swords clashed, people yelled, and crimson vines twisted their way through the burning field. It was almost exactly how the SMP's village had looked from Tommy's bedroom window, all those days ago. The day he'd seen a man kill his wife. The day he'd run.

He remembered crossing the hills that were now on fire, running through the wildflowers that were now shriveling. He remembered what he'd told himself on the way through the forest: if he stopped now, he never should have started at all.

Tommy blinked away the last of his tears and, with Nightmare firmly gripped in his good hand, headed towards the battlefield.

He needed to find Wilbur.

Chapter End Notes

PHEW! Oh gosh, this was another of my favorite chapters simply because I love fight scenes. I think I rewrote it about three times, though, trying to get Tommy and Dream's conversation right. If you're interested, I listened to [this song](#) a lot while writing that scene specifically. Also, for shits and giggles, I realized post-writing that that scene also radiated [this](#) energy 😂😂

Uni Chaos Week 2 starts tomorrow, so... I'll see you guys when I next see you, I guess. Take care of yourselves out there :] <3

Fire

Chapter Summary

There wasn't time to yell again. Wilbur didn't have a bow to shoot. He didn't have a sword, because he was shit with a sword, and who would bother carrying one when they were so much better with a bow? So, Wilbur did the only other thing he could think of. He threw himself between Tommy and the arrow.

//

fires, fighting, and friendship.

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is "[Fire](#)" by Barns Courtney.

CW: blood and injury (I myself am pretty squeamish about blood, so don't worry.

There's no gore)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

At some point between the time he and Phil had left for the Badlands and the time they returned, the Green Forest had changed colors.

Techno grunted, tugging on Carl's reins to get him to slow as they approached another thick clump of vines. Red was everywhere. He couldn't go a quarter mile without seeing some strung in the trees, or weaving through the grass, or dangling in front of him right when he wasn't paying attention.

After several near-misses, Techno decided not to bother scouting for George, Sapnap, and Dream anymore. He had more important things to focus on—like not running straight into a patch of bloodvines.

The vines around him shifted, slinking forward ever so slightly, and Carl whinnied nervously.

"Don't worry, Carl. We're getting there," Techno said.

In truth, he wasn't sure how close they were to Pogtopia. All of the forest had started to look the same—all covered in red, twisting vines that snapped tree branches and trampled wildflowers. He knew what direction he was traveling in, though. As long as he kept going this way, he'd have to reach Pogtopia at some point.

The vines tightened around the trees again, and Techno urged Carl to go a little faster. The last thing he wanted was a branch falling on either of their heads and giving them a concussion.

Carl trotted forward, choosing the clearest path to run down and finally escaping the cluster of vines. Technoblade sighed. Finally. His one solace was knowing that the closer they got to Pogtopia, the farther back the vines should get. Dream had said it would take the vines almost three weeks to get to Pogtopia, and so far it had barely been one and a half since they'd left.

Of course, he probably shouldn't be trusting Dream. Especially not after he tried to blow him and Philza up. And the vines had definitely sped up after all those explosions. He'd barely managed to outrun them.

Techno shivered. If he hadn't liked the vines before, he *definitely* didn't like them now. Every time he saw a hint of the crimson color, his mind flashed back to the tiny room inside the Crimson Castle where he'd spoken to that egg thing. He hadn't gotten a chance to tell Phil what it had said before they left. He wished he could have. If nothing else, it would have been reassuring to have someone tell him the voice he'd heard was just that: a voice.

"Come on, Techno. Touch it. You could have anything you desire. Power, bloodshed, silence, a family..." the Crimson had said.

"I have a family."

"Not for long."

Techno nudged Carl to go a bit faster. There was a downward slope up ahead, and he could hear the river running somewhere nearby. They were getting close.

"Come on Carl," Techno urged. "We're gettin' close, and then the vines should be—"

He never got a chance to finish. Carl had started down the slope in a gallop, and it was too late to slow down by the time Techno realized what they were headed for. The ground in front of them was absolutely covered—*covered*—in vines. They criss-crossed over each other like mesh, tangling and twisting and coiling together. They ran along the whole divot like a river, and spread out along the flatter spots of ground like a net.

Carl dug his hooves into the dirt, and Techno held on tight as his horse frantically tried to stop before they hit the plant.

They stopped just short, a mere inch from the bed of vines blocking their path.

"Prime," Techno breathed as Carl hastily backed up, "how'd these get here so fast? We can't be that far from the castle. They shouldn't be out here yet..."

That's when he heard it. Rustling, almost like leaves in the wind, except heavier and slower, and coming from the vines in front of them. And the ground around them. And the trees above them.

Dreading what he was about to see, Techno looked up.

Vines were crawling down from the trees towards them, slithering in from the grass around them, and the ones in the divot were twisting and shifting, slowly spreading their tendrils out towards them.

Techno rarely swore, but he figured this was as good a time as any to change that.

“Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit,” he said, pulling on Carl’s reins. “We gotta go.”

With a light dig of his heels into Carl’s side, the horse leapt over the divot, just barely making it to the other side before taking off, vines quick on their heels.

Techno ducked and wove through the forest’s thick foliage, skirting this way and that as new vines kept appearing. He could hear them hissing, now, like a rattlesnake preparing to strike. Except there were hundreds of them.

Carl leapt over a log, and Techno had the awareness to vaguely recognize their surroundings before they were hitting the river, running alongside thick vines pointed straight towards Pogtopia.

How long had those been there? They were huge!

It was with a sick sense of dread that Techno realized how close they were to Pogtopia, and that these vines extended far into the woods up ahead. With how big they were, there was no doubt in Techno’s mind that they extended all the way into Pogtopia’s valley.

He urged Carl faster, and that was his first mistake.

His second mistake came when a slithering vine suddenly darted across their path, and Techno shouted out loud. Carl reared his head, bucking back on his hooves, and Techno was thrown from his back. He landed hard on the ground, and all the air left his lungs.

He choked, sputtering for breath as Carl continued to whinny and prance in front of him. He was going to get stomped on if he didn’t move. Worse, he was going to—

Techno felt it before he saw it. Something brushed itself against his finger—so softly it could have just been a blade of grass if not for the feeling that immediately accompanied it.

Techno’s whole body relaxed. His mind grew foggy, suddenly exhausted. He was so tired, he barely even comprehended the fact that the voices had started screaming at him again.

“*Get up!*” one said, hazily.

“*No!*” shouted another.

“*L,*” said a third.

“Hello again,” said a fourth, the only voice that didn’t sound like it was underwater.

Techno gathered the energy to lift his head and look at his hand. A vine had brushed up against it, just barely, but it was enough.

“Ah,” Techno muttered drowsily. “That’s not poggers.”

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Wilbur felt vaguely ill as he reloaded, aimed, and fired his bow. The arrow hit its target, sinking into a man’s calf and making him keel over in pain, but Wilbur didn’t feel the normal rush of adrenaline and pride he usually got from hitting his mark.

These were just people. They weren’t even in control of themselves; it wasn’t their fault the vines had poisoned them. Wilbur had to fight them anyway because, if he didn’t, they would destroy Pogtopia and take everyone here down with them. But he didn’t feel good about doing it. He supposed no one with a conscience would.

His eye caught on a flash of metal further out in the grass. There was Jack Manifold, the village carpenter, swinging his sword in a horizontal arc towards his opponent. To his right was Niki, hair flying as she spun around and aimed a kick at the soldier behind her. They seemed to be working together, watching each other’s backs as they fought.

An arrow thunked into the wooden pole beside Wilbur’s head, and he refocused on the ground directly below him. It only took him a second to locate the person who’d shot the arrow—a short, fully armored man—and it took him half that time to load his bow and fire it at the man’s leg. It struck true, and the man quickly limped off to deal with it.

“Wilbur,” Quackity called from the other side of the tower balcony, “I’m going down there.”

Wilbur nodded. “Alright. If you can get someone to go get more arrows while you’re down there, we might need those soon.”

Quackity nodded, and then he was gone, slipping down the ladder to the bottom of the tower with a sword gripped in his hand.

Wilbur looked down at the quiver by his feet. There were only three arrows left. It wasn’t nearly enough.

At least Phil’s here now, he thought as he nocked another arrow and raised his hand to his cheek. He caught sight of Quackity running out into the battle, and tried to clear the way for him a little by aiming at anyone who tried to intercept him. There were only two people who tried to take on Pogtopia’s head guard, one that Wilbur easily nicked on the heel—‘*Achilles’ heel*,’ Techno would have joked if he were here—and the other Wilbur disarmed with an arrow to the shoulder. Which was more painful, Wilbur decided he didn’t want to know.

He squinted his eyes at the edge of the fields while he nocked the last arrow. The fire was spreading. It wasn’t close enough to reach the gardens quite yet, but it was getting there. The sun wasn’t helping. The further up it rose in the sky, the hotter it got out on the battlefield. The grass was catching like matches.

The good news was it forced the Crimson Army to consolidate in one area and worked to keep out most of the vines. The bad news was that with every inch of grass it took, it got closer and closer to Wilbur's home. Soon, he and Tubbo would have to leave the tower and retreat further from the flames. But for now...

Wilbur's train of thought trailed off as a flash of gold caught his attention. He looked down, closer to the tower's base, and realized it wasn't gold that had caught his attention, it was a mop of bright blond hair. Tommy.

The kid was holding his own against one of the Crimson Soldiers. Somehow he'd acquired an enchanted sword, and its blade glittered purple as he swung it, easily blocking and countering his opponent.

Wilbur quickly raised his bow and aimed at the soldier, but before he could release—

Thwack!

Wilbur blinked, stunned, as another arrow split straight through his. He looked down and immediately locked eyes with one of Dream's guards—Sapnap—who had a bow in his hand and was already drawing another arrow.

Fuck. That'd been Wilbur's last one.

"Tubbo," Wilbur called, quickly backing away from the window. "Got any more arrows?"

The younger king had been shooting off the opposite side of the tower, but when he turned to face Wilbur, his hands were empty. "I just used my last one," he explained, frowning. "I was hoping you had more."

Wilbur shook his head.

"I can go get more."

"No, you..." Wilbur trailed off as he peered back over the edge of the tower. Down below, Tommy was still fighting against the one soldier. He ducked under the soldier's blade, and his eye caught on Wilbur's.

"Wilbur!" Tommy yelled, raising his free hand in a wave. He was grinning, hair wild and sweaty in the morning sun. "Wilbur! I—"

Wilbur didn't hear the rest of whatever Tommy said. His attention caught, instead, on Sapnap still lingering in the grass nearby. He'd crouched down, letting the long strands of summer grass almost completely shield him from the view of anyone on the ground, but he had his bow in hand and was aiming straight at Tommy. Tommy, who'd gone back to fighting. Tommy, who probably couldn't hear Wilbur over the sound of swords clashing together. Tommy, who was completely oblivious to Sapnap's presence behind him.

Before Wilbur had a chance to second guess himself, he'd already thrown open the trapdoor and scrambled down the ladder. He jumped off with ten rungs left, heart pounding as he hit the ground. His crown toppled into the dirt.

The door to the tower was locked from the inside, but he unlocked it swiftly, bursting out into the blinding sunlight.

“Tommy!” Wilbur screamed, running towards him. Sapnap was pulling back his bow.
“Tommy, *move!*”

“Wha—?” Tommy turned towards him, confusion turning to shock in his eyes as he registered Wilbur barreling towards him.

It wasn’t enough. He wasn’t moving *enough* !

There wasn’t time to yell again. Wilbur didn’t have a bow to shoot. He didn’t have a sword, because he was shit with a sword, and who would bother carrying one when they were so much better with a bow? So, Wilbur did the only other thing he could think of. He threw himself between Tommy and the arrow.

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Tommy, it turned out, was a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield.

He spotted Wilbur in one of the towers, and made it halfway to him before running into his first conflict. That soldier was easily dealt with. All Tommy had to do was jab the butt of his sword into the man’s stomach and he was crumpling to the ground, wheezing. The second soldier he crossed was a bit tougher, but one of Snowchester’s soldiers took them off of his hands before the fight could get too rough.

Then there was the third. He’d nearly made it to the base of Wilbur’s tower when a Crimson Soldier stepped into his path, sporting a gnarly grin and wielding a silver sword.

“*Where do you think you’re goin’, little one?*” the soldier had asked, a golden tooth glittering inside his mouth. “*Why don’t you join us?*”

“*I’m not fuckin’ little,*” Tommy had spat back, and then the fighting began.

Their blades connected over and over again, faster and faster, as Tommy backed the soldier closer and closer to Wil’s tower. He had to give the man some credit—he put up a good fight. Tommy was just better. He swung harder, faster, stronger, and calculated his moves quicker. He was light on his feet, and knew exactly where to shift his weight to keep himself balanced. Techno’s tips rang through his head as he fought, and he kept his motivation in the back of his mind: get to Wilbur. Get to safety. Fight for yourself.

He was so caught up in the battle, he didn’t realize an arrow had been aimed at him until it was too late.

“Tommy! Tommy, *move!*”

Tommy turned, and his eyes widened as he saw Wilbur hurtling towards him. What was he doing on the ground? And why did he look so panicked? He wasn't even looking at Tommy; he was looking at something else just to his left.

Tommy followed Wilbur's gaze just in time to see Sapnap's arrow release. By then, though, there wasn't time to move. There wasn't time to do anything but close his eyes. Nightmare slipped from his grasp.

Suddenly, a pair of arms enveloped his shoulders. Tommy's eyes flew open.

Wilbur was hugging him to his chest, his back turned to Sapnap. For a moment, it was just the two of them locked together. Then a sickening thud came from behind Wilbur's back and the prince cried out, hands fisting into Tommy's shirt.

Tommy barely registered the second, louder thud from behind him—the Crimson Soldier he'd been battling falling to someone else's attack—as Wilbur's legs gave out and Tommy slowly lowered him towards the ground.

"Shit, fuck, Wilbur? Wilbur!" Tommy yelled, desperately clutching his friend to him as they sank to the ground.

Wilbur didn't answer, and for a single, heart-stopping moment Tommy feared he was dead—that he'd been killed instantly by the arrow—but then he saw Wilbur's eyes screw up, a tear trickling out before he opened them.

"Fuck that hurts," Wilbur hissed through gritted teeth, and Tommy let out a choked sob.

"Wilbur! Wil! What the fuck? Why did you do that?"

Tommy shot a look upwards, hunting for Sapnap, but the knight had disappeared. That bastard.

Tommy's hands trembled as he rolled Wilbur slightly into him, trying to get a look at the arrow in his shoulder. It didn't appear to have gone in too deep. He could probably pull it out if he just—

"*Don't* take it out," Wilbur said, voice laced with pain. "It'll make it worse. Jus'... just help me back inside the tower."

Tommy opened his mouth to protest, but Wilbur was already pulling his legs underneath himself. He tried to push away from Tommy, but cried out in pain when his left shoulder moved. Tommy quickly wrapped his arms around Wilbur's torso, helping him stumble unsteadily to his feet.

"Wilbur, you're— you're hurting yourself!" Tommy said, eyes catching on the crimson stain trickling down the back of Wilbur's white shirt.

Wilbur grimaced again, squeezing Tommy's shoulder so hard it hurt, but he shook his head. "No," he grit out, "It'll be... worse if we stay out here. Please."

Tommy looked up at Wilbur's face—pinched and pale with pain—then out at the battle still raging behind them. Wilbur was right. If they stayed out in the open much longer, someone would surely notice Wil was injured and come to attack them.

“Alright. Okay,” Tommy said, wrapping his arms tighter around Wilbur and letting the older boy lean into his side. “This way.”

They walked clumsily, like drunkards after a night in the village pubs, but made it inside the tower nonetheless. Tommy slammed the door shut behind them and locked it before carefully helping Wilbur back to the ground.

Wilbur groaned, taking a fistful of the grass beside him and squeezing. His other arm, with the arrow in his shoulder, hung limply at his side.

“Sit still and let me see,” Tommy said, letting go of Wilbur to move behind him.

The wound wasn't terrible—definitely not fatal, as long as it was treated quickly and properly—but the sight of blood staining Wilbur's shirt was enough to make Tommy suck in a breath. He wasn't squeamish by any means, but this was *Wilbur*. Tommy had never seen Wilbur hurt before, and he decided right then that he never wanted to again.

Plus, he had no clue what to do.

Tommy had dealt with bruises. He'd dealt with cuts and scrapes, with a broken bone from falling down the stairs when he was eleven, and with his sprained wrist from coming here. But he'd never dealt with an arrow to the shoulder. And there was definitely still an arrow lodged in Wilbur's shoulder.

Thankfully, before Tommy could panic further, Wilbur spoke.

“Do you... do you have a rag on you?”

Tommy looked down at himself. He'd run out here in his clothes from yesterday— *his* clothes, the old red vest and white shirt, and the baggy cargo pants. The only other thing he'd had on him was Nightmare, but he'd left the sword in the grass outside.

“N-no,” Tommy stammered. “I have—”

“I do.”

Tommy's attention snapped up to the ladder in the middle of the tiny space. Tubbo was on it, hurrying down the rungs with something dark green clutched in one hand.

“I saw you get shot,” Tubbo explained, leaping off the last few rungs and joining Tommy at Wilbur's shoulder. “Quackity went after him right after.”

“Good... good. I— You're gonna have to take the arrow out and wrap up my... my shoulder with that.” Wilbur exhaled shakily through his teeth.

Tubbo nodded, raising the dark green object up to Wilbur's shoulder, and only then did Tommy realize what it was. A bandana. A wrinkled, dark green bandana with fraying edges.

"I'm gonna pull the arrow out now," Tubbo said, cautiously wrapping a hand around the arrow shaft. "Three... two... one!"

Tubbo yanked the arrow out, and Wilbur *screamed* .

Tommy felt tears rise unbridled in his eyes as Wilbur sobbed out loud. The rubber band feeling in his chest was back—each individual band tightening painfully. Not knowing what else to do, he reached out and held Wilbur's lax hand.

"Fuck, that hurt," Wilbur managed through his tears, yanking a fistful of grass from the earth.

Tubbo didn't reply. His tongue was stuck between his teeth, blue eyes focused on the bleeding tear in Wilbur's shoulder. Tommy watched the younger prince's hands loop the thick bandana around and around Wilbur's shoulder and then pull, tightening the makeshift bandage before tying it off.

"I don't know how long that's gonna last you, Wilbur," Tubbo said, examining his work. "And you'll definitely need anti-septic..."

"It'll... last enough," Wilbur breathed.

There was a moment of silence between the three, broken only by Wilbur's occasional sniffles. Tommy let his eyes fall back to the bandana tied around Wilbur's shoulder.

"I have a bandana just like that," he said before he could stop himself. "It's red, though."

"Oh?" Tubbo looked up at him. "That's neat. I have more of them back in Snowchester, actually. If we traded them, it could be like... I dunno... a friendship thing."

"A friendship thing?"

"Yeah, like bracelets. Or... or coins. Or... I dunno." Tubbo chuckled lightly, looking back down at his lap. "Having friends when you're the ruler of a country is hard. I'll admit, I haven't had much experience."

Tommy smiled softly. "Me neither."

He tightened his hold around Wilbur's hand, and allowed one of the rubber bands to snap off his chest when Wilbur ever so lightly squeezed back.

"Tommy," Wilbur said after another moment had passed. "Phil's back. He was looking for you."

Instantly, all the weight of what had happened in the castle foyer crashed back down on Tommy's shoulders.

“I know,” he said, looking down at the grass beneath his knees. It was short and green, nothing like the tall, yellow grass outside. A few feet away, Wilbur’s crown lay upside down in the dirt. “He already found me.”

Wilbur turned questioning eyes towards him. “What did he want? He seemed worried.”

“Ah...” Tommy bit his lip, tearing his eyes away from the golden crown. “Well, Dream’s here. I’m pretty sure Phil’s fighting him right now, actually, inside the castle.”

Wilbur sniffled.

Tubbo’s eyebrows rose.

Then, simultaneously...

“ *What?* ”

Chapter End Notes

hello! I'm currently rush-updating before a uni class, so I can't say much, but thank you all for reading! I hope you're having a good morning/afternoon/evening/night/you know the drill :]

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Brother

Chapter Summary

It came out softer than Tommy had probably meant it to, but he didn't take it back. In fact, he looked up right after he spoke—blue eyes connecting with Wilbur's and holding there—as if waiting for confirmation that what he'd said was true. Or maybe it was the opposite, and he was waiting for stinging rejection. For Wilbur to laugh in his face and ask when on earth that idea had weaseled its way inside Tommy's head. For him to deny it.

//

in which the author does that thing where they go for a sprinkle of found family and accidentally dumps in the whole bucket. whoops.

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is ["Brother"](#) by Kodakone.

CW: blood, injury, mentions of abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno didn't know how he made it to Pogtopia, but his feet must have carried him somehow, because one second he was laying on the ground in the Green Forest, and the next he was standing on the precipice of a battlefield.

Warm, summer air swirled around him as he stood on the hill just outside the forest, squinting across the valley at Pogtopia. The fields were alight with fire. He could see people, vaguely, in little dark outlines amongst the flames. They were fighting each other.

"What happened to the field?" a voice asked. They must have been talking a lot while Techno wasn't paying attention, because his head pounded with the beginnings of a migraine.

"Wilbur lit it," another answered. *"Had to be done."*

"Vines came too quick."

"We're too late..."

"Go. Join them."

"The Crimson's army is waiting for you."

The last voice was the Crimson's: deeper and raspy in Techno's mind. It almost sounded like the hissing of the vines as they slithered through the grass.

"Go," it urged. So Techno did.

It took him two minutes to reach the river, one minute to cross it, and another to find a way through the flames. Then he was on the field, sword in hand. He couldn't recall when he'd drawn it.

"Blood."

"Blood for the Blood God."

"That's a lot of people."

"Go find Wilbur!"

"Tommy?"

"Red, red, red..."

"Phil's inside!"

Techno clenched his fist around his sword's handle. Who the hell was Wilbur? The voices hadn't shut up about him ever since he... ever since he what? Woke up? No, he'd been awake. He was... he was fighting for the Crimson, and he'd walked here, so he couldn't have been asleep.

Techno's eyes raked over the battlefield. No one seemed to notice his presence yet; all too busy fighting, blades clashing over and over again in the sunlight. He watched one pair—their backs pressed together—fight against four opponents. He critically examined the fighting stances of a short, dark haired man with a long scar over his face.

"Heh," he muttered, words slurring slightly. He couldn't quite get a grip on his thoughts. That was fine. That was normal, right? "He needs t' bend lower..."

The Crimson's voice chuckled. "This is your element, isn't it?" it rasped in his ear.

Techno didn't reply. His head really did hurt. Maybe he could get some medicine for it, after he helped Wil—the Crimson. No. He'd meant... he *did* mean Wi...

Techno blinked, and when he opened his eyes again, his sword was slamming down against someone else's. The person was panting, eyes wide and arms shaking as if they'd been fighting for a while now. The sleeve of their shirt was torn, just below the shoulder pad of their armor. Red liquid oozed out of it, staining the edge of a teal, blue, white, and gold flag patch on the person's uniform.

Had Techno done that to them?

“Please,” the person was saying, struggling to raise their sword, “I’m on Pogtopia’s side! I swear! I’m not poisoned!”

Pogtopia? Poisoned?

“Please,” they continued. “We have to... we have to stop the bloodvines.”

Bloodvines.

Techno’s sword slid off of the other soldier’s. Who had said that word to him before? The Crimson never referred to itself like that—it preferred to be called a god—but someone else had. Someone young, with blond hair and a scrawny frame, fidgeting in the middle of a large room at night. Someone with blue eyes, peering out from a dark cabinet. Someone who the voices were screaming at him to remember, named—

“Tommy! Tommy, *move!*”

Techno and the other soldier both spun towards the voice.

There, a fair distance away near one of the guard towers, a brown-haired boy was wrapping his arms around a shorter blond. He’d made it just in time. Not even a second later, an arrow impaled the brunette’s shoulder and he cried out, knees buckling and face pressing into the younger boy’s shoulder.

“Wilbur!” the kid cried, slowly lowering them both to the ground.

Techno didn’t hear any more. His hearing had gone static, all the blood rushing to his head.

The funny thing about being controlled by the Crimson was that it was much easier to fight against when you’d already been fighting with voices in your head your whole life prior.

Of course, Techno’s voices usually only fought with him over stupid little things like “*ew, this food’s gross*,” or “*No no no, Theseus’ story did not go like that.*” But it was more experience than most people had, and it gave Techno the slight advantage he needed to recognize his brother’s voice and snap out of it. He had to snap out of it, because that wasn’t just anyone who’d fallen to the ground. That was Wilbur. That wasn’t just anyone holding him. That was Tommy.

Techno’s wide eyes slid from the two boys kneeling in the grass, over to the castle gates. The vines were climbing them slowly, attempting to breach the last guard between the field and the place Techno had called home for the past nine years.

Phil’s in there, Techno realized, remembering what one of his voices had mentioned earlier.

He loved Phil. He loved Wilbur. A small, but quickly growing part of him even thought he might love Tommy, too. They were his family. This was his *home*.

“What are you doing?” the Crimson hissed. “I can give you anything you desire. If you help me, I will repay you tenfold. I can grant you power over your enemies, I can silence your voices. Could you imagine what that would be like? What we could do together?”

Techno's eyes were drawn back to Tommy and Wilbur as the younger wrapped his arms around Wilbur's torso, helping him hobble back towards the tower. They were not brothers, but they might as well have been. They looked like family. The feeling Techno got watching them *felt* like family. Because family was not, he realized, your own bloodline. Family was a feeling. It was safety, and care, and protectiveness, and love all shoved into one, six-letter word.

"You can give me anything I want?" Techno asked the Crimson.

"Anything."

He watched the door slam shut behind Wilbur and Tommy. He examined the red vines twisting and climbing the castle walls. He observed the fight raging on *his* family's land, the fire burning away *his* family's fields, the soldiers attacking *his* family's people and friends.

"I want you to go back to where you came from and leave me, my family, the people from Pogtopia, and all the lands around us the *hell* alone."

—>>->>->>->>->>—

Phil wasn't sure how long he and Dream had been fighting. He'd lost count of the amount of times their swords clashed together, metal scraping against metal until they pushed away. Again and again and again; it was a never ending dance.

The foyer's marble floor was scraped from one too many accidental hits with the blades, but it didn't matter. In comparison with everything else that was at stake, the floor was meaningless.

Phil wiped the sweat from his brow as he and Dream circled each other, breathing hard.

"I don't understand," he said, tensely watching the green king for his next move. "Why do you want our land so badly?"

"Land equals power, Philza," Dream replied, equally breathless. He, too, was sweating. "Everyone knows that."

"But why ours?"

Dream shrugged. He stopped circling to shoot a wry smirk at Phil. "Your resources, the fact that you're in the middle of all the other lands and can have good trade, simple lust. It's not really all that complicated. Plus—"

Dream raised his sword, lazily draping it over his shoulder as he watched Phil. Phil swallowed. He felt oddly like a bird being stalked for prey.

“—I like using strategy. If I knock the stronger areas down first, the weak will be quick to follow.”

Dream swished his sword down from his shoulder and lunged across the circle at Phil, who quickly raised his own blade. The swords collided with a harsh bang.

Phil grunted, pushing against the blade. “Is that why you tried to kill us in the Badlands?”

“Well, the plan was originally just to kill *you* in the Badlands,” Dream admitted. “I didn’t expect Techno to come with us.”

With a hard shove, the two broke away from each other once more. Dream ducked low and aimed a blow at Phil’s ankles. Phil leapt over it.

As he landed, Dream caught his eye and grinned. “What’s the saying, killing two birds with one stone?” He gave Phil’s wings a pointed glance. “Seems fitting, doesn’t it.”

“How long have you been planning this?” Phil asked, ignoring the jab in favor of blocking another of Dream’s swings.

He wasn’t sure if he should be surprised at the realization that, if Dream’s original plan hadn’t involved Techno, that meant he’d been planning to blow up Phil since before their first meeting. In fact, he’d probably had the plan in mind when he wrote Phil that first letter. It had all been a game to him. He’d strung Phil along with suggestions of joining forces and finally resolving their decades old conflict, and all the while he’d been planning to kill him. He was an usurper, a tyrant. For no reason other than lust for power.

Dream swung his sword in a diagonal slice. Phil parried it.

“I’d been planning for months,” Dream confirmed.

A chill shuddered down Phil’s spine. He blocked another of Dream’s blows. A monarch killing another was *regicide*. Dream had been planning to commit *regicide* for months. He’d been inside their castle, plotting to *kill* them. He’d stood by Techno, rode with them through the forests and desert. He’d spoken to *Wilbur*.

“Wilbur still would have been here,” Phil said, stepping back before their swords could collide again. “He would have taken the throne after me.”

Dream laughed—wheezed, really. He stopped fighting, stepping away and swinging both of his arms out to the side. “Wilbur was supposed to be dead!” he exclaimed. “I told you, I’m strategic. I lied when I told you the vines wouldn’t be here for nearly three weeks, they would have gotten here in just over *one* !” He glanced towards the castle doors. On the other side, Phil knew, a battle was waging. “Of course, the TNT sped the process up a bit more than even *I’d* expected. But Wilbur was always supposed to deal with this on his own. I tore up his letter to you so he would be fighting alone. I just didn’t expect him to be *good* at it.”

Phil’s eyes widened at the confession of the stolen letter. So that’s where that had gone.

“You underestimated him,” Phil said, raising his chin ever so slightly.

“Hm,” Dream hummed, “we’ll see about that. The fight’s not over yet.”

For a moment, neither of them moved. Then Dream lunged forward. Phil raised his sword just in time to catch the blade, but Dream came back faster this time. They swung again and again, the clashes echoing in the open foyer.

“How did you know Tommy was here?” Phil asked, remembering the night outside the Crimson Castle when he and Dream had first argued. He’d been thinking about it ever since it happened, wondering how Dream knew, since Phil couldn’t remember ever seeing Tommy when Dream was around. Knowing what he did now, it made sense that Tommy hadn’t been around during Dream’s visits. He’d probably been off hiding somewhere while they all talked.

Dream circled Phil’s sword and pressed down, trying to knock the blade from Phil’s grasp. Phil tightened his grip and pressed right back.

“It wasn’t hard,” Dream chuckled as they struggled against each other—caught in a stalemate. “Tommy leaves footprints wherever he goes. When you said the word ‘bloodvines’ at our meeting here, that was the first give-away. He coined that name.”

Dream stopped pushing down to swipe upwards with his sword instead. Phil took a step back, the blade narrowly missing his chin.

Dream stepped back as well, giving his sword a quick twirl. “I only suspected it, then, though. I knew for *certain* the day we left; I saw him in the window.”

Phil grit his teeth together. Sunlight was streaming through the glass panes around them, streaking across the floor and outlining Dream in bright white. They’d moved away from the center of the floor, further towards the front doors.

“Why didn’t you ask me about it before we hit the desert?”

“I realized I could use it against you later. Strategy, remember? Plus, I like having backup plans. If the vines didn’t kill your sons, or if Wilbur didn’t consent to me taking over, the ability to put them both in prison for kidnapping worked.”

Dream stepped forwards. “I’m not stupid, Philza,” he said. “I calculate my moves.”

Phil opened his mouth to respond, but before he could, Dream swung to the side. He missed Phil completely, but the edge of his blade smashed through one of the flower vases standing in front of the window. Water rushed out as the vase crumbled, the liquid quickly slipping over the marble floor and surrounding them in a giant puddle. The tips of Phil’s wings began to soak up the water, and he hurried to try and pull them up, away from the floor.

Before he could back out of the puddle, Dream swung again, this time aiming for him. Phil narrowly avoided the blade, stumbling back and nearly slipping on the wet floor.

“Did you know, in chess, a king isn’t allowed to kill another king?” Dream asked, eerily calm as the puddle grew larger and larger around them. He swung again, and Phil just barely

managed to block it.

They held their blades together, in stalemate again, until Dream leaned forward and pushed all of his weight into his blade. His force combined with the slippery floor gave Phil no way of keeping his balance. He stumbled back two steps before his feet slid out from under him, and he landed on his back in the middle of the floor.

Dream swung his blade down again, and Phil raised his just in time to block. He grit his teeth together, hissing, as he put all of his strength into holding Dream's sword off of him.

"You think this is all some sort of game?" Phil replied. His arms shook. "That people are just pieces on a chessboard? Easily discarded so you can get to... what? Power?"

His hair was wet. He could feel water seeping through the blond strands, seeping through his clothes, seeping into his *wings*. The wetter his wings got, the heavier they became beneath him. If he didn't get up soon, they were going to weigh him to the floor.

It was with a grimace that Phil realized that was probably what Dream intended when he broke that vase.

Dream sneered at him from above, pushing even more weight into their locked swords. "I wouldn't put it like that, Philza. After all, even a pawn is worth something."

Phil's gaze darted around quickly, but where was he supposed to go? He was pinned. Dream was on top of him with his sword, and if Phil even slightly relaxed his blade Dream would undoubtedly slice him. He couldn't roll out from under him without being cut, either.

His wings were taking on water fast, but he couldn't snake his arms out of their straps until he was free. He needed to move. It was moments like these he wished he had extra arms, or —

That was it.

Phil rolled to the side just enough that he unpinned one of his wings. With all the strength he could muster, he pushed against Dream's sword, simultaneously reaching down with one hand and yanking his wing's pulley.

It was much harder to pull the wing open when it was soaking wet, but Phil was running on adrenaline and the protective rage of a father. The wing popped open with a heavy *whoosh*. It smacked right into Dream's face, and Dream stumbled back with a cry.

Phil scrambled to his feet. Water dribbled off of him, droplets splattering against the floor below as he put more space between himself and Dream. His wings were so heavy. They weighed down on his back like mini boulders, and he hurried to shrug them off.

They dropped to the floor in a soggy heap just as Dream turned back to him.

Blood was trickling from Dream's nose. The back of his hand came away red as he wiped it.

When his eyes returned to Phil's, a dark shadow had fallen over his expression.

“I’ll kill you,” Dream growled, sword raising as he approached. His boots slapped against the wet floor. “I’ll kill them all. Your army, your guards, your *family* —”

Phil didn’t think twice. As soon as Dream was close enough, he raised his sword, and brought the flat end down on the SMP king’s head.

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

“We’re going to need medical supplies.”

Wilbur looked up from his spot against the wall. Tubbo and Tommy had helped relocate him to one side of the tower, letting him rest his good shoulder against the wall while they sat across from him and figured out what to do next. Apparently, Tubbo was worried about how long his fraying, green bandana would last around Wilbur’s steadily bleeding shoulder. Normally, Wilbur would have been worried too. But there were bigger things to worry about than him right now. Like the fact that there was a large, blood-thirsty army right outside.

“Not now,” Wilbur replied to Tubbo, attempting to push himself up. “I can keep going. Where’s my bow?”

Immediately, both Tubbo and Tommy scrambled to push him back down.

“You’re not going to be able to draw a bow with your shoulder all fucked up,” Tubbo said matter-of-factly, gesturing up and down at Wilbur’s side. “And besides, we’re out of arrows.”

Wilbur sighed frustratedly, resting his head against the wall.

All three of them were down their weapons. Tommy had lost his sword outside in the grass, and he and Tubbo were still out of ammunition for their bows. Leaving the tower was a gigantic risk, but it was one that someone was going to have to take eventually if they wanted to get more weapons. And, apparently, if they needed more supplies for his shoulder.

His back ached. The pain had steadily spread from his shoulder to encompass his entire back, just like the fire had spread out in the fields. It burned like fire, too, but only if he moved it. He wished he’d had a way to wash it before Tubbo bandaged it up. Even if it would have stung, at least it would have removed the possibility of infection.

“I can go back for the stuff,” Tommy offered.

Wilbur shook his head. “Absolutely not. You said Dream’s in there.”

“With Phil.”

“You don’t have any weapons.”

“ *Yet* .”

“*Tommy*.” Wilbur raised his head from the wall. “I’m already worried about Dad. Please don’t make me worry about you, too. Not now.”

Tommy huffed, crossing his arms stubbornly over his chest. But Wilbur caught the subtle tension in his friend’s shoulders. Tommy was worried too.

“It’s not like we can stay here much longer anyway,” Tommy continued to argue. “The fire’s going to reach this tower eventually. We’ll have to move.”

Wilbur opened his mouth to retort, but Tubbo beat him to it.

“Tommy’s right,” he said, glancing over at the blond-haired teen. “We’ll have to leave eventually. Preferably before the fire gets here.”

“So what if we all just ran for it?” Tommy quickly tacked on. “I know it sounds like a terrible idea, but I can go up the tower right now and scout us out a route. I can probably grab Ni—my sword, if it’s still out there, and then Tubbo can help Wil.”

“And you’re somehow going to protect us all from everyone out there?” Wilbur asked, raising an eyebrow. “Alone?”

Tommy huffed. “Listen, dickhead. I’m good with a sword—”

“Right, and when someone shoots at you from the grass and I have to protect you again—”

“You didn’t *have* to do anything!” Tommy’s voice echoed on the stone walls, stunning Wilbur into silence. “You didn’t *have* to step in front of me! Just like you didn’t have to let me stay in the castle, or teach me to read, or shoot, or let me in your office, or do... do fuckin’ anything, man! I don’t—” Tommy’s voice cracked, and he looked down at the dirt beneath his knees. There was a smudge of it on his pant leg. “I don’t understand why you keep doing it.”

Wilbur’s heart sank. “Doing what?” he asked. When Tommy didn’t respond, he tried again. “Doing what, Tommy?”

“Caring about me.”

It came out softer than Tommy had probably meant it to, but he didn’t take it back. In fact, he looked up right after he spoke—blue eyes connecting with Wilbur’s and holding there—as if waiting for confirmation that what he’d said was true. Or maybe it was the opposite, and he was waiting for stinging rejection. For Wilbur to laugh in his face and ask when on earth that idea had weaseled its way inside Tommy’s head. For him to deny it.

Wilbur turned so he was no longer resting against the wall, and faced Tommy full-on. This was the kid he’d joked around with in the gardens and woods, learned about during their long nights in the office, taught to read, and listened to music with on the castle balcony. He’d learned that Tommy was many things: loud, brash, and annoying when he wanted to be, but also kind, and funny, and the type of person who would never kill a spider. Somehow, in the span of days, he’d become one of Wilbur’s best friends. Of course he cared about him.

“Of course I care about you,” Wilbur said out loud. “You’re my friend. I stepped in front of you because I didn’t want you to get hurt, and couldn’t find another way to block the arrow. I made that choice myself. And... and all the other things...” Wilbur shrugged as best as he could with one shoulder, offering Tommy a small smile. “That’s just what friends are for, I guess.”

There was a short pause. Then Tommy inhaled. “You shouldn’t have to. I’m a fuck up, and a nuisance. I’m overdramatic, and manipulative, and... and you’ll get tired of dealing with me eventually.”

“Is that what Dream told you?”

Tommy’s eyes widened in surprise. He began to shake his head, then paused. “N-no? I mean, yes, but... Wilbur, you’re too nice. You just don’t see it, but eventually you will, and you’ll want to get rid of me. I—”

“Tommy.”

Tommy stopped rambling, his mouth snapping shut and eyes returning to Wilbur’s face. He swallowed.

“Remember what I said to you that day, in the hallway beside the cabinet?” Wilbur asked. When Tommy didn’t make a move to speak, he answered the question himself. “‘People who care about you don’t try to hurt you.’ Have I ever tried to hurt you?”

Slowly, Tommy shook his head.

“So what does that mean?”

“You... you care about me.”

“Right. And when I decide to care about something, it’s stuck with me whether it likes it or not, Tommy. My caring is unconditional, like... like how Techno cares about sword fighting, and how Phil cares about Pogtopia, and how we all care about each other.”

“So—” The beginning of a grin was tugging at the corners of Tommy’s mouth, now. He looked significantly more relaxed as he knelt in the dirt a few paces away. “—you’re saying you care about me like a... like a brother?”

For a second, no one said anything. Then Wilbur rolled his eyes dramatically.

“Don’t say that, I will cry,” he teased.

Tommy’s expression cracked, a full-blown grin spreading across his face right before he launched himself across the floor to Wilbur. He didn’t hug him, exactly, but he did sit very close to him on his good side. He pressed his head into Wilbur’s good shoulder, the same way Wilbur had done to him outside, and wrapped an arm loosely around his torso. Wilbur chuckled, leaning his head on top of Tommy’s.

“If you say a word of this to anyone else, you’re dead to me Tubso.” Tommy’s words were muffled in Wilbur’s shirt. “Quackity still thinks I’m a Big Man. I can’t ruin that reputation.”

“I don’t think anyone thinks you’re a big man,” Tubbo replied, but when Tommy turned to glare at him, he quickly tacked on, “except me.”

Wilbur burst out laughing, but was quickly stopped by a flare of pain from his shoulder. Shit. He needed to stop moving it.

Tommy slid away from him, coughing awkwardly and glancing at Tubbo. Tubbo nodded.

“Right, so we should probably go back towards the castle now, before the fire gets here. Tommy, uh, go see if you can find a route up there. I’ll help Wilbur get up, and we’ll wait for you here.”

Tommy nodded once before scampering off up the ladder, leaving Wilbur sitting alone. As soon as he was gone, Wilbur turned his attention to Tubbo.

“This is incredibly risky,” he said, watching as the younger prince wearily pushed himself up from the grass and walked over to him.

“Yeah, it is,” Tubbo agreed. He extended a hand down to Wilbur. “But everything has some amount of risk to it, if you think about it. You just gotta choose the ones you’re willing to take.”

Wilbur took Tubbo’s hand.

Chapter End Notes

hello! fun fact: the line with the fic's title (sorta) in it I added in on a whim at 12am last night while doing a read-through. I was reading aloud in my dorm room, so if anyone in the hall heard me dramatically proclaiming "blood for the blood god" at 12am... I'm sorry. XD

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr @youreyeslookliketheocean!! <3

Burning Pile

Chapter Summary

Phil could see them slithering through the grass around the three boys, slowly getting closer and closer. The vines were coming from all sides. They were going to be trapped. Phil let his wings fall flat against his back, and took off down the hill.

//

huminahuminahuminahuminahumina...

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is "[Burning Pile](#)" by Mother Mother.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil left Dream unconscious and tied up in the dining hall as he ran outside. He'd slid his wings back on, ignoring the droplets of water that trailed from the tips of his feathers as he entered the courtyard. The heat from both the summer sun and the fire burning across the field would be enough to dry them out relatively quickly. At least, that's what he hoped.

Phil's heart raced as he took in the scene around him.

Red vines had snaked themselves over the castle gate and up the walls. They'd wound themselves around and around the castle's golden spires—so tight that shingles had started to come loose and the stones were cracking.

Phil tore his eyes away from the castle, turning back to the front gates and unsheathing his sword.

The gates were covered with vines, but they were easy enough to cut through. They dropped, one after the other, to the ground as Phil swung at them, and then he was wrenching the gate open himself, and rushing out into the field. The good thing about living on a hill, Phil supposed, was that it gave him a very clear view of the rest of the valley. He could see the armies battling each other—ten of his soldiers there, several more there, one fighting solo against two from the bloodvines' army. He could see the guard towers, and the fire inching closer and closer to them. He couldn't make out the river nor the forest anymore—the thick smoke having concealed them entirely—but he trusted that they were still out there somewhere beyond the bubble of chaos Pogtopia had become.

Phil set his eyes back on the tallest guard tower. That was the one Wilbur and Tubbo had been inside earlier, but he couldn't see them up there anymore. Nor could he see Tommy. Where were they? Were they still there and he just couldn't see them?

Phil stretched his wings out experimentally. It took a bit more effort than usual since they were so heavy, but they extended. He held them open and hopped a little, testing the wind. There wasn't much. He'd never take off. But it was enough to lift him a bit higher than he could normally jump, and to allow him to see even more of the field. It was also enough to confirm that Wilbur, Tommy, and Tubbo definitely weren't on top of the tower.

Phil's chest tightened with anxiety. What if someone had attacked them from inside the tower? What if Tommy hadn't made it there? What if Wilbur and Tubbo had left, and now all three of them were out in the field somewhere, lost, and fighting alone?

Phil's feet hit solid ground again, but he used the force to easily spring back up. His eyes desperately scanned the field for anything recognizable—Wilbur's brown hair or silver glasses, Tubbo's uniform, Tommy's blond curls. They had to be here somewhere. They had to —

Phil's eye caught on a flash of purple out in the field. It was a sword—gleaming bright in the midst of orange and crimson flames. It flashed back and forth as the person wielding it struck out at anyone who tried to get close, and that's when Phil realized who the person was. It was Tommy, swinging the sword Phil had seen by the castle door when he'd first entered. Wilbur and Tubbo lagged behind him, Wilbur's arm slung over Tubbo's shoulders and Tubbo's arm wrapped around Wilbur's waist. Tubbo, too, had a sword, but he wasn't using it except occasionally to point ahead. For the most part, they avoided the battle waging in the middle of the field. Only occasionally would Tommy have to swing out at someone around them, and most of the time another soldier from Pogtopia's side was quick to step in. But the vines were another story. Phil could see them slithering through the grass around the three boys, slowly getting closer and closer. The vines were coming from all sides. They were going to be trapped.

Phil let his wings fall flat against his back, and took off down the hill.

"Wilbur!" he yelled. "Tommy! Tubbo!"

It was no use. They weren't going to hear him.

Still running, Phil bent down and snagged a lone bow from where it lay in the grass. It didn't take him long to find a couple arrows—they were scattered all along the ground. He shoved them into his belt, pulled his wings open, and with a leaping bound, let the wind pick him up and carry him closer to the three boys.

"Wilbur!" he screamed again, shifting his weight to aim right towards them. "Vines!"

Tubbo noticed the vines first.

“Tommy!” he shouted over the sound of swordfighting and crackling fire. “Look out for vines!”

He spoke just in time. Barely even a second later, Tommy raised his sword and swung at a vine slithering across their path. He sliced it neatly in half, but as they continued through the grass more were quick to follow.

“Shit,” Tommy muttered, flipping Nightmare in his hand and swinging again.

They weren’t that far from the castle gates. Another couple minutes of walking and they would have been there if not for the vines that kept intercepting them.

Tommy swung frustratedly at another vine, killing it just in time to stop it from snagging his ankle. He could hear Tubbo doing the same behind him—hopefully also protecting Wil.

“Uhh, Tommy?”

Tommy jumped away from another vine. Where were they all coming from all of a sudden? “What!”

He glanced back over his shoulder to see Tubbo holding onto Wilbur with one hand and using the other to brandish his sword out at the field to their left.

“I think we might be surrounded,” he said.

He was right. Tommy could see them now: the vines slithering closer, bending the grass under their tendrils. It was coming at them from all sides, encircling them and drawing tighter, tighter, like a boa constrictor encircling its prey.

Tommy had learned all about boa constrictors from a book on reptiles he'd found in Dream's library. He hadn't actually been able to *read* what the book said, of course, but a picture was worth a thousand words, wasn't it?

Tommy slashed at the nearest vine and watched as it shriveled away. Almost immediately, another slithered forward to take its place.

“What the fuck?” Tommy cursed aloud.

Tubbo seemed to be struggling similarly. In his peripherals, Tommy could see him swinging the sword he'd picked up in the field. He was chopping as many vines as he could, but they just kept coming.

The circle around them was growing smaller, and the vines started to stack on top of each other, climbing higher and higher and *higher*.

Swoosh!

Tommy jumped as a figure touched down in between him and Wilbur and Tubbo. The figure spread their wings, quickly encircling the three of them before the vines could reach any of them.

“I hate,” Phil panted, “these fucking vines.”

Phil. Phil was here.

And he has a bow, too, Tommy realized as Phil withdrew his wings to aim an arrow at a layer of vines. He released, and the arrow whizzed right through the middle of the red tendrils, splitting them all nicely in half.

“Dad,” Wilbur muttered. His face was pale and sweaty as he looked up at Phil, but he was smiling.

“What happened to you?” Phil asked worriedly, but there was no time for Wil to answer.

The vines kept tightening inwards. Phil lowered his wings to slash at some on the left, while Tommy and Tubbo took the right-hand side.

“Why are they all after us?” Tubbo yelled.

“I don’t know!” Tommy replied, swinging harder. “These fuckin’ *weeds*, man!”

An arrow whooshed through their little circle, but by the time Tommy looked up, Phil had already shot down whoever aimed at them. A chill tingled down Tommy’s spine. Phil was just *eeeeever* so slightly scary when he was serious.

They kept fighting. It felt like hours, but it really must have only been a few minutes. Either way, the vines kept coming. They piled on, steadily building and building as if they were going to create a cage around them. Maybe they were. Tommy wasn’t sure. All he knew was one second, he’d turned his back on the vines to look at Wilbur, and the next Phil had raised his wings around all of them again—just in time to block the crimson vines from touching them.

They stayed there, huddled and panting, for a tense moment.

This is it, Tommy thought. *All of this fighting to get free, just to be brainwashed by a fucking weed*.

There was nowhere to go. They’d been cornered, successfully, by the vines. Out of all the things to kill him—it could have been the arrow Wilbur blocked, could have been someone out in the battlefield, could have been *Dream*—it was a fucking *plant*. They were trapped, and the vines were going to poison them, and Tommy was never going to tell them thank you. He was never going to get to thank Phil for protecting him, or Techno for teaching him to fight, or Tubbo for offering him a friendship bandana, or Wilbur for unconditionally caring about him. He wasn’t going to get to tell them that he loved Phil’s laugh, or Techno’s sarcasm, or Tubbo’s intelligence, or Wilbur’s reassuring grin. He wasn’t going to be able to explain how his heart had leapt at the prospect of Wilbur considering him a brother.

Then, Phil shifted above them. “That’s weird,” he said, “they didn’t actually grab my wings.”

Slowly, Phil tugged the pulleys connected to his wings. The wings expanded ever so slightly, feathers ruffling above their heads, but no vines slipped through, and Phil was met with no resistance whatsoever.

Warily, Phil lowered his wings.

The sight that met them was like a scene from one of the books Wilbur had read him. The battlefield before them was silent save for the rustling grass and crackling fire. All across it, bodies had collapsed. It took a moment for Tommy to realize the only ones left standing were members of Pogtopia’s army. Everyone who’d been brainwashed by the vines was down on the ground.

The vines themselves were slinking away, shriveling back into the grass and disappearing into the fire. The ones that had encircled them mere moments ago were gone.

“Wha—?” Tubbo mumbled.

The sky rumbled, and Tommy felt the first drops of rain hit his skin as the four of them stood there, staring out in bewilderment at the retreating vines and collapsed army.

“What happened?” Tommy dared to breathe, tearing his eyes away from the field to look up at Phil.

Phil frowned. The rain began to fall harder, pattering against Phil’s wings, against the ground around them all, and sending droplets sliding down the bridge of Tommy’s nose.

“I... I don’t know,” Phil said.

“Did we win?” Wilbur asked, voice slurred.

He was answered with resounding cheers from all across the battlefield. Tommy had never heard so many happy voices shouting, whooping, and hollering.

The rain began to fall faster and faster until it was downright pouring. Fires started to sizzle out in the distance, including the one that had been approaching their guard tower. Tommy watched it all with wide, disbelieving eyes.

They’d just... gone! What had happened?

“Let’s get you back to the castle,” Phil said, breaking Tommy from his thoughts as he turned to Wilbur.

Wilbur was leaning heavily against Tubbo now, wet hair plastered to his forehead and grimacing against the pain in his shoulder. The bandana had been completely soaked through—whether with blood or with rainwater, Tommy didn’t want to know. Wilbur didn’t even argue as Phil bent down and scooped him up into his arms. Instead, he curled in further, muttering a quick “I don’t feel good” into Phil’s chest.

“I know. What happened?”

“He got shot by an arrow,” Tommy spoke up. He fidgeted in the grass as Phil turned to him. “He was protecting me.”

He knew Wilbur didn’t blame him for the incident, but as Phil’s eyes landed on him, Tommy couldn’t help but shrink into himself. He didn’t know what Phil would think. Would he be mad that Wilbur had gotten hurt because of him? Would this be the final straw that snapped him?

Tommy waited with baited breath for the snap, but it never came. Instead, a warm hand took his shoulder and gently drew him closer. Tommy’s mouth popped open to question it, but before he could utter a single word, the rain above his head cut off as Phil’s wing raised above him like an umbrella. Tommy looked over to see that his other wing was similarly shielding Tubbo.

“Alright. Let’s get back inside before any of you catch cold,” Phil said, gently nudging them forwards through the grass.

A gentle, surprised warmth bloomed in Tommy’s chest. It was such a strange, comforting feeling; Tommy didn’t even notice when all the rubber bands around his chest snapped.

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Techno was fed up with two things: falling asleep and migraines.

So when he woke up in the middle of Pogtopia’s field with a splitting headache, he was pissed, to say the least. Pissed for all of three seconds, before he blinked the last bits of sleep out of his eyes and realized that... *huh* . The battlefield looked different than he remembered it being.

For starters, it was raining. Heavy droplets coated his hair like crystals, and his clothes were already soaked through. The ground squished as he took a step forward.

Secondly, the battlefield was quiet. Pogtopia’s soldiers were still out, scouting around the grass and helping pull strangers back to their feet, but compared to the clanging, clashing, screaming sounds of battle earlier, this was nothing.

Techno lazily blinked his eyes. The last thing he remembered before he must have passed out was... was...

Techno’s eyes instinctively flew to the castle.

The vines were gone.

Gone . The curls of crimson that had looped themselves around the castle gates were gone. As were the ones that had begun stretching up the walls. They'd vanished.

As Techno spun around, surveying the entire field, he realized *all* the vines appeared to have fled. In fact, the only traces that they'd been there at all were the Badlanders and SMP members that the Pogtopia soldiers were helping to their feet. Their eyes were wide and confused as they took in their new surroundings.

Techno thought he knew how they felt.

He remembered what the Crimson had said to him, after he'd told it he wanted nothing to do with it anymore. It had tried to convince him to stay.

"Your family could join you," it had hissed. *"I'll get them right now. All it takes is one touch."*

Techno had stood his ground. He knew how to deal with voices that weren't his own. He'd known what he wanted, and when the Crimson finally gave in, that's when his memory failed and everything went black. But prime if it hadn't been tempting. With the Crimson in his head, it would have been so much easier to simply give in to it—to let it take him over completely. And then... Techno didn't want to think about what could have happened then. He still remembered the fear in the eyes of the soldier he *had* fought—the one with blood dripping from his sleeve.

Shivering against the rainfall, Techno realized the final difference: no one was fighting anymore. Not the soldiers, not the vines, not even the voices in Techno's mind.

"Erm, what's going on?" Techno asked.

He didn't want to get his hopes up, but he also prayed that he was right, that his loophole had worked.

Like he'd struck TNT, his brain immediately exploded with voices.

"E."

"Thank prime he's awake."

"Vines gone."

"Vines gone!"

"Pog."

"You're back!"

"EEEEEEEEEE..."

Techno chuckled. His head was throbbing, and he wished they'd be a little quieter, but he was glad his regular voices were back and the Crimson's was gone.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said, starting forwards through the muddy grass. “So where’s Wilbur?”

—»-»-»-»-»-»—

Phil sank back against his chair in the kitchen. His wings had been abandoned on the countertop, and they dripped beads of water down to the floor below in a steady rhythm. Next to him, Wilbur sat with his shoulder clean and freshly bandaged. He, at least, had been able to change out of his clothes. So had Tommy. And Tommy had given Tubbo a pair of the clothes Phil had let him use, so all three of them were dry.

Phil hadn’t been so lucky. He’d spent the last few minutes after Wilbur was taken care of speaking with the guards, making sure Dream was still passed out, and asking how the clean up was going outside.

The vines had left. There was no doubt about it anymore. Although no one knew exactly why, they’d gone, and the people who’d been brainwashed by them were finally set free. They’d all collapsed when the vines abandoned ship, but now they were waking up, and Pogtopia’s remaining soldiers were out in the field helping to pick them up and get them settled.

Phil had dedicated the throne room to them. He’d brought as many dry towels as he could find—along with snacks, water, and extra blankets—to the throne room for the survivors. Then he left Quackity in charge while he went to talk to Wilbur, Tommy, and Tubbo.

“What’s going to happen with Dream?”

It was Tubbo who asked first. He was sitting across from Phil, next to Tommy, with his hands buried in the green sleeves of the shirt Tommy had given him.

Phil didn’t miss the way Tommy tensed and glanced towards the doors that led from the kitchen into the dining hall. Dream wasn’t in there anymore; the guards had moved him somewhere else. But Phil didn’t blame Tommy for being paranoid.

He’d explained to all of them, vaguely, what had gone on in the foyer after Tommy left. In return, Wilbur, Tommy, and Tubbo had explained what happened with the arrow and the guard tower. They’d all discussed their confusion over what had happened with the vines, but also their relief that they were gone—at least for now. Phil had told them what happened with himself and Techno back in the Badlands, and tried to assure them that Techno would be back in Pogtopia any minute now, riding on Carl. He was just a bit slower, since Phil had flown and Techno had to ride. Once all of that was out of the way, they’d come to an impasse, wondering who would mention the elephant in the room first.

Dream.

Phil sighed, rubbing his hands against his knees. His soaked pants squished under his palms. “Well, I think a trial will be necessary, with all of the kingdoms present. Obviously, he did

something wrong. *Many* things wrong.” Phil glanced over at Tommy, who’d drawn his knees up into his chest. He was still looking at him though, so Phil took that as a sign to continue. “But, legally, we have to prove that before we can do anything. I don’t want to be a dictator.”

“There’s no way the other kingdoms won’t agree with you, though,” Wilbur spoke up beside him. “Right?”

“Probably not, no. Pogtopia is on good terms with pretty much everyone, and they have no real reason to doubt me. Plus, a lot of them don’t like Dream either. I doubt that they’ll argue against us when we tell them what happened. I just...” Phil trailed off, thinking of Dream’s threats to put Techno and Wilbur in prison. Dream wouldn’t have given them a trial; Phil knew that. “I want to do this the right way,” he finally concluded.

Wilbur nodded, something in his eyes lightening. “Me too,” he said quietly.

“Theoretically, what’s going to happen to the SMP lands once Dream’s off the throne?” Tubbo asked.

Phil frowned. “Normally it’d go to the next heir, but...” He trailed off as all three pairs of eyes in the kitchen fell on Tommy.

Tommy’s eyes widened. He lifted his chin from his knees, shaking his head vehemently. “Absolutely fuckin’ not. I’m not gonna be in charge of a whole fucking kingdom.”

“Oh no, no,” Phil hurried to assure him, “of course not. You’re only fourteen, and adopted, and the laws are all weird about both of those things as it is. That’s why Techno’s not first in line, and Wilbur is. Someone else can take over the land right now. But... when you’re old enough... if you ever wanted to...”

Tommy bit his lip and pulled his legs closer to his chest. “I don’t think... I don’t really want that.” His blue eyes flicked to Wilbur.

“Right. And you absolutely don’t have to,” Wilbur hurried to step in. “*You* get to choose. If you don’t want it, then you don’t have to agree to it. You can say no.”

Tommy nodded, his shoulders sinking. “Then... no. I don’t really want to have anything to do with the SMP lands right now. Or ever. If that’s alright.”

Phil smiled. “Of course that’s alright.”

“So who’s going to take it over?” Wilbur asked.

“Well, I suppose really anyone could now. Maybe the people there could have an election.”

“That would be neat,” Tubbo said, nodding. “I’ve been trying to convert Snowchester from a monarchy to more of a democracy. I like that type of government better, honestly.”

The room lapsed into a short discussion of politics, and Phil listened attentively as Wilbur and Tubbo debated back and forth on the pros and cons of different systems. He smiled to himself. Both of the boys beside him were brilliant. Wilbur had learned well, and Tubbo was

incredibly smart all on his own. Phil could remember when they were both toddlers, wobbling around on little legs while he and Schlatt talked politics exactly like they were now. It was almost funny to realize how much they resembled their parents.

“Where would we be putting Dream?”

Wilbur’s question snapped Phil out of his reminiscing.

“Pogtopia doesn’t have an official prison, and neither does Snowchester,” Wilbur continued. “Not one that could hold an ex-king, at least. So... where’s he going to stay if the trial goes how we think it will?”

“That’s a good question. The Badlands?”

“The Badlands will probably need a while to get itself back together after the vines,” Tubbo said, resting an elbow against the table. “As will the SMP. If the vines really are gone, at least. But I might have a suggestion. Do you guys know of Pandora’s Box?”

At blank stares from Phil and Wilbur, Tubbo explained, “It’s this massive prison in the ocean between Snowchester and the mainland. It’s not too far off land—close enough that I saw it while I was coming here. Sam from your village told me about it while we were training together. He said he built it a while ago. Dream paid him to do it, actually. No one’s in it right now.”

“Dream paid him?” Tommy spoke up. He raised his head from his knees.

Tubbo nodded. “That’s what Sam said. I don’t know why he wanted a prison built.”

Phil sank lower in his seat. He thought he had a hunch why.

Suddenly, the kitchen door swung open. Everyone turned to look at the intruder as they stepped inside, dripping puddles of water onto the floor.

“Did I hear the word ‘prison’?” Technoblade asked, pushing his hair back from his eyes as he surveyed the kitchen table.

“Techno!”

Surprisingly, it was Tommy who jumped up first. He practically flew around the table to hug Techno, wrapping his arms around his torso and squeezing. Techno laughed, ruffling Tommy’s wet hair.

“Theseus, I’m all wet.”

“Don’t care.” Tommy’s voice was muffled into Techno’s side.

Techno huffed, but a fond smile spread across his face. He rolled his eyes and stepped further into the kitchen, letting the door close behind him.

“So, the vines are gone,” he stated. Then his eyes locked on Wilbur. “You. You absolute idiot. Who do you think you are taking an arrow like that?”

Wilbur chuckled nervously, reaching up to rub at the bandages covering his left shoulder. “You saw that?”

“Yes. What kinda defense tactic was that?” Techno walked closer until he was right in front of Wilbur’s chair, staring down at his brother.

Tommy quickly unlatched himself, stepping back and to the side as if he was scared a fight was about to break out.

Wilbur scratched the back of his head. “A scuffed one?”

Techno’s face broke into a grin. He bent down and wrapped Wilbur in a light hug, carefully avoiding his hurt shoulder. “We’re going to have to work on those tactics when you’re healed.”

“Okay, Technoblade.”

“I’m glad you’re okay.”

“I’m glad you’re okay, too.”

Phil’s heart warmed as he watched his sons separate. Techno took a seat at the head of the table—they’d all completely ignored their normal spots—and rested his elbows against it. Tommy slid silently back down into his chair beside Tubbo.

“So Techno, where exactly have you been?” Wilbur asked after a moment had passed. “If you saw me take an arrow...”

And so started the next twenty minutes of conversation. Techno explained everything: the things even Phil didn’t know had happened to him while in the Crimson Castle. How he’d encountered the vines while riding Carl through the Green Forest; how he’d touched one, and the Crimson’s voice had come right back to tell him what to do; the soldier he’d fought and how he’d seen Wilbur go down. He explained how he’d spoken back and forth with the Crimson, outwitting it because of the slight amount of control he’d had over his own thoughts.

When he was finished, it was Phil’s turn to explain everything that had happened to him once he got to Pogtopia. Flying in and barreling into Wilbur’s guard tower; bursting into the castle just in time to save Tommy from Dream; dueling with Dream, and relaying just some of the words that had passed between them; running outside to see Tommy, Wilbur, and Tubbo all struggling against the vines; going to help them, and then the vines suddenly leaving. Phil explained as much as he could.

Wilbur jumped in occasionally with his perspective on the events, and both Tubbo and Tommy chimed in about how they’d decided to run back to the castle after Wilbur was shot.

Then it was Tommy's turn. He fidgeted as he explained how he'd woken up to fighting, how he'd tried to go outside but Dream had stopped him, how he'd had to fight against him until Dream pinned him with his sword. He glossed over the details, but no one prodded him for any more information than he was willing to give. He stopped when his story met up with Phil's, and then they all sat back, heads bursting with new information but glad to have gotten it all sorted out.

"Is this what family meetings are supposed to be like?" Tubbo asked after they'd finished. "Because my dad's idea of a family meeting consisted of playing poker and talking about how many documents he was putting off."

Phil chuckled. "That does sound like Schlatt. Yet, somehow, he always got them to me on time."

Tubbo tried to hide his smile by looking down at the table, but Phil still caught it.

A comfortable silence stretched between the five. Outside, they could still hear the rain pouring down. That was good, Phil thought. The more it rained, the quicker all the fire outside would be extinguished. He wondered how much of the field had been burned away. Surely, it couldn't be too much. There'd been a lot of fire, yes, but not enough to engulf the guard towers before the rain hit. That was only about one-third of the field that had gone upon flames, then. Hopefully.

He'd have to survey the damages sometime later. Maybe once his wings dried.

Phil was brought back down to the kitchen as Tommy coughed.

"So, um," Tommy stammered, knees still firmly pressed to his chest, "Dream is going to go to prison?"

Phil opened his mouth to respond, to reassure Tommy that Dream would never be coming near him again if he could help it, but paused before the words could slip out. Tommy's face was pale, and his fingers left bright pink indents where he clutched his arms.

"Do you not want that?" Phil asked, concerned.

Tommy opened his mouth, then closed it, then opened and closed it again. His eyebrows knit together as he concentrated, and Phil waited patiently for him to speak.

"N-no I do, I just..." Tommy paused again, drawing his arms tighter around his knees.

"What's going to happen to me? Where am I going to go? I—I don't want to go back to an orphanage. I'm not old enough to get a room at an inn or anything, according to Wilbur. Unless you change the law. Phil, can you make fourteen the legal age for adults?"

Phil started to laugh, but Tommy cut him off.

"And I've never... The only time I've been without Dream was when I was here. And what if Dream, I dunno, breaks out? What if he finds me! He already found me here once. He... he threatened to *kill* me! Dream, he— What if—"

“Tommy,” Phil said, abruptly halting Tommy’s downward spiral.

He stood up, walking around the table to kneel by Tommy’s side. Tommy watched him the whole time, wide eyes following him curiously.

“Tommy,” Phil started again, smiling at the wide-eyed boy sitting in front of him, “I meant what I said to Dream earlier. It’s your choice, but you can stay with us if you want to. And... if Dream goes to prison and his custody of you is revoked... and if you’d like...” Phil swallowed, glancing nervously at his two sons across the table.

He hadn’t actually had a chance to talk to either of them about this. He’d barely even talked to himself. The thought had passed, of course, through his mind a couple times over the past few days. But now, kneeling here on the cold kitchen floor, it felt so obvious. Tommy was already here. Why not let him stay?

Wilbur caught on to his question first. His eyes widened, and a smile quickly began to stretch across his face. He nodded enthusiastically, and Phil turned his attention to Techno.

Techno’s eyes darted back and forth between Phil and Wilbur. It took him a second, but Phil saw the moment Techno realized what he was asking. His eyes slid to Tommy, and after a long, exasperated sigh, he nodded his head as well.

“What? Stop communicating telepathically. It’s freaking me out,” Tommy interrupted.

Phil pulled his gaze back to him. “Tommy,” he said again. Third time was the charm. “What if you lived with us?”

Tommy’s brow immediately furrowed in confusion. “Lived with you?”

“Yeah. Like... like if we adopted you?”

Tommy’s eyes blew wide. His hands lost their grip on each other, and his legs dropped down to the floor. “W-what?”

Phil shifted nervously. His knee was starting to hurt from putting all his weight onto it. “You could live with us, permanently, if you want. I know Techno and Wilbur would love to have you as part of the family. I would too.”

Tommy looked back and forth between Wilbur, Techno, and Phil. “You... you would?”

“Of course.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

Tommy gaped at them. Phil wished he knew what was going through his mind. He could see flashes of emotion flicker through his eyes—confusion, wariness, hope—but nothing was actually said to confirm any of them.

Finally, Tommy looked back at Phil. “I... I don’t really know what to say,” he managed to choke out.

Wilbur coughed from the other side of the table. “ *You say* ‘yes’,” he said between coughs.

Tommy blinked, dumbstruck. Then his face broke into the biggest smile Phil had ever seen.

Funny. He’d never noticed how Tommy’s smile was ever so slightly crooked before.

“Yes,” Tommy said quietly. Then, louder, “Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!”

Phil laughed as Tommy practically toppled forwards and into his arms. The blond was giggling hysterically as Phil wrapped his arms around him, pulling him into the first hug they’d ever shared. It felt good. It felt *right* .

Not even a moment later, three other pairs of arms joined them on the floor. Tommy continued to laugh until he was crying, clinging to Phil and sniffing as Techno, Wilbur, and Tubbo encircled him.

“I’m not crying,” Tommy sniffled into Phil’s shirt. “I’m a Big Man.”

“The biggest,” Tubbo confirmed.

“Are you sure about that? ‘Cause I’m pretty sure Tommy’s not even six foot yet...”

“He *is* legally a child, still. When do you think he’ll hit his first growth spurt?”

“Wilbur, I *will* put spiders in your bed...”

“If you could even reach it...”

“Techno!”

All five of them burst into laughter.

Outside, the storm began to clear.

Chapter End Notes

anndddd we're just about done! I'll save my spiel for the last chapter I guess, but if you're here now, thank you for reading this far!! I really truly 1 million and 1 percent do appreciate it.

also, for your informational purposes, I did also read this chapter aloud in my dorm room. much quieter this time, though. no repeats of shouting "blood for the blood god" at 12am. XD

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! also, feel free to pop by and say hello on
tumblr [@youreyeslookliketheocean](#)!! <3

Glowing

Chapter Summary

“Will Tubbo be here today?” Tommy asked, peering up at Wilbur.

“Of course. Practically everyone’s coming.”

“Practically?”

A grin stretched across Wilbur’s face as he finished off Tommy’s braid. “Well, obviously, the spiders of the kingdom are not invited.”

//

a crown, a king, and a glorified epilogue.

Chapter Notes

Chapter title song is ["Glowing"](#) by The Oh Hellos!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“AaAAHHHHHHH!”

Tommy jolted awake to the sound of screaming.

He rubbed the sleep from his eyes, sitting up and blearily peering at his bedroom window. Through the tiny crack between the curtains, he could see that it was still dark outside—the sky a washed-out gray color. It couldn’t be any later than six a.m.

Who the *fuck* was screaming at six in the fucking morning? Couldn’t they see he was trying to sleep? Wilbur’s coronation was today, and, believe it or not, Tommy actually needed his beauty rest to look good for it.

The screaming had stopped, and Tommy—drowsy as he was—decided it was most likely nothing. He flopped back down and pulled the blankets back over his head.

He liked his bedroom here in the castle. He’d moved next door to Wilbur shortly before Phil officially adopted him, and now he had a nice view of the river that ran through the valley. He also had his own bathroom, a bigger wardrobe, and a tall canopy bed like Wilbur’s. In comparison with his old bedroom in the SMP, he was, quite frankly, living like a king.

Not to mention all the midnight shenanigans he got up to, living next to Wilbur.

“AHHHH! TOMMY!”

Speaking of Wilbur.

Tommy tossed his covers off, leaping out of bed. He was awake enough now to realize it'd been Wilbur screaming right next door.

His heart pounded as he flung his door open, raced to Wilbur's room, flung that door open as well, and—

“Wilbur! Wilbur, what's wrong?” Tommy asked, taking in the scene.

Wilbur was in the corner of the room, standing on top of his desk in pajamas and bare feet. All of his sheets had been tossed to the floor, and he was brandishing his pillow in two hands raised above his head.

When he saw Tommy staring at him, Wilbur gestured down at the heap of blankets on the ground. “There was a *fucking gigantic* spider on my bed! I woke up and it was right in front of my nose! It's still in there somewhere. I'm going to fucking kill it.”

Wilbur raised his pillow higher, and Tommy hurried to step further into the room.

“No, no, no! Don't worry. I'll catch it.”

He knelt down next to Wilbur's crumpled sheets and started to carefully tug the layers of fabric apart. “Exactly how big did you say this spider was, again?”

“ *Fucking gigantic* —”

“Wilbur?” Techno's groggy voice interrupted from the doorway. “What's goin' on?”

Tommy sighed as his eyes caught on the tiny, brown spider tangled up in Wilbur's sheets. It was barely the size of the tip of his thumb—a far shot from the ‘ *fucking gigantic* ’ description Wilbur was now relaying to Techno.

As he straightened out the fabric to get to it, the spider took off across the blanket, its little legs quickly scrambling to get away. Unfortunately, Tommy was quicker. He cupped his hands around the little spider before it could get further than a few inches, caging it in. With his pinky finger, he nudged it until it climbed onto his hand. Then he cupped his other hand over it, successfully trapping the tiny bed-invader between his palms.

“Did you get it?” Wilbur asked from his corner.

“Yes.”

“Thank prime.” Wilbur jumped down from the desk, his feet hitting the wooden floor with a loud *thud* . He kept his distance from Tommy's cupped hands, flipping them off as he walked back over to his bed. “Little dickhead crawling around in *my* bed...”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Don't listen to Wilbur,” he stage-whispered to his closed hands. “He's just a pussy.”

“Hey!”

Tommy ignored Wilbur’s angry mutterings and Techno’s laughter as he made his way over to the window. He propped it open with an elbow and extended his hands to the stone sill outside, letting the little spider crawl out and onto it.

“Bye bye, little guy,” he said softly, nudging the spider slightly further out before slamming the window shut.

When he turned back to the room, Techno had made his way over to Wilbur’s pile of sheets and was helping him sort through it, putting blankets back on the bed one after the other. Tommy yawned. He picked Wilbur’s pillow up off the ground and chucked it onto the bed as his contribution to the clean up.

“For prime’s sake, Wilbur. I thought you were being murdered or some shit,” he said.

“I almost *was* .”

Tommy caught Technoblade’s eye from across the room, and they shared a deadpan look.

“It’s a *spider* , Wilbur,” Techno said. “You’re twenty-two years old and still can’t handle an *insect* .”

“A spider is *not* an insect. It’s an arachnid,” Wilbur corrected. He neatly folded the tops of his blankets down. “If you’re going to insult me, at least be factually correct.”

“You’re so right. Even though *you’re* the one who woke us up at Dead O’clock in the morning, screamin’ over a spider, *I* feel so stupid right now.”

Wilbur shot a glare across the bed at Techno, but the harsh look only lasted a second before melting away. Wilbur chuckled. “This is a great start to my coronation day, isn’t it?”

Techno laughed, and Tommy joined them as they all climbed on top of Wilbur’s bed.

“What are all your loyal subjects going to say when they find out their king’s deathly afraid of spiders?” Tommy teased, settling in between Techno and Wilbur. Apparently, none of them were going back to sleep.

“They’ll sympathize with me. Besides, once I’m king, spiders will be banned from the kingdom.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s, like, impossible to do.”

“Not when you’re me. Spiders fear me.”

Techno laughed. He gestured to the window. “That one obviously didn’t.”

Tommy giggled as well, flopping back to stare at the top of Wilbur’s bed. The dark red fabric draped across the rectangular opening and then trickled down on all four sides into curtains. Wilbur never actually slept with them closed, Tommy had found. They were mostly just for

decoration. Which, fair enough, because Tommy never closed his either. He didn't like the darkness, nor the feeling of being closed off from the rest of the world.

"That one was a dick," Wilbur huffed.

Techno shifted on the bed. "Are you nervous about today?" he asked, and Tommy didn't need to ask to know the question was directed at Wilbur.

"You know, I'm actually less nervous than I thought I'd be," Wilbur replied.

"Really?"

"Mhm. I think I'm ready for this."

Tommy smiled as Wilbur scooted closer to start messing with his hair. Over the past few years he'd had it cut, so it wasn't quite as long as it had been when he was fourteen anymore, but Wilbur still loved to twist it into tiny braids that stuck out all over his head. Techno thought it was funny, and Tubbo had laughed hysterically and then demanded Wilbur do the same to his hair the last time he'd come over.

"Will Tubbo be here today?" Tommy asked, peering up at Wilbur.

"Of course. Practically everyone's coming."

"Practically?"

A grin stretched across Wilbur's face as he finished off Tommy's braid. "Well, obviously, the spiders of the kingdom are not invited."

—»-»-»-»—

A few hours later, Tommy bounded down the stairs to the foyer dressed in quite possibly the nicest clothes he'd ever worn.

The white shirt had long, puffy sleeves that flared out around his wrists. His pants were pastel blue—reminiscent of the sky outside—and cinched with some sort of elastic just below his knees. Techno had helped him with his "cummerbund", a sash of royal blue fabric around his waist which's name Tommy found endlessly entertaining. Then, under the collar of Tommy's white shirt, Techno had also helped him tie one of those lacy, five-tiered ties Tommy had seen him and Wilbur wear before. Techno wore one, too, but his was plain white while Tommy's was blue.

The coolest bit, though, was the arm length pale blue cape draped across Tommy's back. He'd never worn a cape before. He'd watched Phil make it, though, over a series of long nights in the dining room, and now it fluttered behind him as he jumped off the last step and landed on the marble floor.

“I’m here! I’m here!” he panted, running up to where Phil, Wilbur, and Techno had gathered in the middle of the room. He slipped easily into their little circle, grinning as Phil wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

“Alright, that’s everyone,” Phil said, and only then did Tommy realize that one of the guards was standing nearby, watching them with an amused expression on his face. “We can open the gates now.”

The guard nodded and scurried off, but not before Phil could plunk something cold and heavy onto Tommy’s head.

Tommy frowned, reaching up to grab whatever Phil had just given him. His hands came away with a crown.

“Ugh, *Phiiiiil*,” Tommy whined, turning to look at the man standing next to him. “Why do I have to wear this?”

Phil laughed, reaching out to take Tommy’s crown from him. “It’s custom, Tommy. And besides, it’s only a small one. Much smaller than the one Wilbur’s about to have to wear.”

At Tommy’s pout, Phil smiled. He reached out to ruffle Tommy’s hair like Techno and Wilbur usually did. “You don’t have to if you really don’t want to. But look, Techno’s wearing his.”

It was true. Techno was wearing a crown—golden, and flashier than the ones Tommy had seen him wear before. So was Wilbur. Besides Tommy, Phil was the only one not wearing one. But Tommy knew that was only because Phil had to wear a special one later, as part of the ceremony.

Tommy sighed, reluctantly taking the crown back from Phil and jamming it onto his head. “Fine.”

Phil grinned. He squeezed Tommy’s shoulder one last time before letting him go. “Thank you, son.” He winked.

Tommy couldn’t stop the smile that spread across his face at Phil’s words. Being called Phil’s son always sent a jolt of renewed giddiness through him, and he couldn’t help but grin whenever it happened.

Honestly, *fuck* Phil for knowing his weaknesses.

He looked down at his shoes so no one else could catch his expression, holding his crown in place with one hand. The marble floor beneath their feet was still scratched from both his and Phil’s struggle against Dream four years ago.

Now, Dream was in Pandora’s Box Prison off the coast of Snowchester. The last time Tommy had seen him, they’d been in court, and Tommy had been testifying against him with Phil and Techno. Dream wound up being arrested on multiple charges, but the only ones Tommy could remember were attempted murder, and child abuse and neglect.

Back then, those words had nearly paralyzed him. He remembered clinging to Wilbur's hand for hours after Dream had been taken off to prison, unsure of how he was supposed to feel. Eventually, Phil sat him down in his room to talk through everything. But until then Tommy had felt like he was clinging to the edge of a cliff, desperately trying to stop himself from slipping off.

It was one thing for him to think that Dream was a bad guy. It was completely different to have it proved to him in court.

The words were less intimidating now, though. Sure, they were still scary, but Dream was gone and Tommy didn't belong to him anymore. He felt safe here. He *was* safe here; Phil had promised him that on the same day of their talk. And he trusted Phil. He trusted all of them.

"Come on, let's go greet the guests," Phil said, already heading off towards the front doors.

—»-»-»—

There were quite a lot of people outside.

It felt like even more once they'd all slipped through the palace doors and into the foyer.

Tommy meandered through the crowds of socializing guests, feeling incredibly small for the first time in a couple of years.

He'd hit a massive growth spurt a year after Phil took him in, shooting up until he was taller than Phil by a good several inches. Techno and Wilbur were still taller than him, but not by much. He was only about an inch shorter than Wilbur, and a couple shy of Techno.

Now, in the midst of hundreds of people, Tommy had to jump up and down to catch sight of Tubbo across the hall.

"Tubbo!" Tommy yelled over the sounds of laughter and chatter in the open space.

His voice carried, and Tubbo's head whipped up to look for him, eyes wide.

"Scuse me. Pardon me. Coming through. Sorry! Sorry, sorry, sorry..." Tommy wove his way across the room to Tubbo.

As soon as he'd made it, he was immediately pulled into a lung-squashing, rib-breaking hug.

"Tommy!" Tubbo greeted, laughing as Tommy wheezed from the force of his hug. "How've you been? I got your letter, like, two days ago, but figured I'd just see you here and didn't write back."

Tommy scrunched up his nose and crossed his arms in mock offense. "Rude bitch. You're leaving me on read?"

“No! Of course not!” Tubbo laughed. “Consider yourself lucky I read it at all. You sent four pages of writing to a fucking dyslexic person, man. *Back and front!* Your handwriting sucks, by the way.”

Tommy snickered, sharing a grin with his best friend. They’d started writing letters back and forth to each other years ago, just a few weeks after Tubbo left Pogtopia with the army he’d brought. It’d been Wilbur’s idea. He’d thought Tommy could use the practice, since at that point he’d still been learning to read and write for himself, and Tubbo had written back almost immediately—ecstatic to keep in contact. He’d sent a green bandana with his second letter.

In Tommy’s third, he sent Tubbo his red one.

“Oh!” Tubbo jumped, snapping Tommy out of his thoughts. “This is Ranboo, by the way.”

Tubbo reached behind him to tug another man forward by the wrist, and Tommy’s eyes flickered to him.

He was tall, towering over Tommy by almost a full foot. His hair was split colors—one half white and one black, and Tommy couldn’t figure out which side was dyed or if they were both somehow natural. His eyes, too, were multicolored. The one on his right was green, while the left was a startling magenta color.

Ranboo smiled hesitantly, sticking a gloved hand out for Tommy to shake. “Nice to finally meet you,” he said. “Tubbo talks about you all the time.”

Before Tommy could respond that ‘*of course he does, he’s my best friend . And who the hell are you?*’, Tubbo jumped in.

“Ranboo’s my husband. We got married for tax benefit reasons last year,” he explained, and Tommy’s eyebrows rose.

Tax benefit reasons? Tubbo was *married*? To *this* guy? Being married felt a little like something Tubbo maybe should have included in a letter.

Tubbo must have misinterpreted Tommy’s surprise, because he immediately continued, “Don’t worry, it was a closed ceremony. No one was there but us. If we’d had a real wedding, I definitely would have invited you. Ooh! But look at my ring!”

Tubbo immediately shoved his left hand in front of Tommy’s face, waving it about to show off the glittering gold ring on his fourth finger.

Tommy realized he was gaping, and quickly shut his mouth.

“Anyway,” Tubbo said breezily, as if he hadn’t just dropped a nuclear bomb on Tommy’s brain, “how’s it been over here? Is Wilbur nervous for today? I like your crown, by the way.”

Tommy instinctively reached up to clutch the crown Phil had jammed on his head. “Er, thanks. I—”

He was saved from trying to continue the conversation with a short-circuiting brain as someone placed a hand on his shoulder. He turned around to see that Quackity had walked up behind him, sporting a smile and dressed in a fancy suit.

“Big Q!” Tommy exclaimed, immediately raising his hand for their signature handshake.

Quackity bumped his elbow against his at the end of their greeting, a giant grin splitting his face. “Big Man Tommy! Looking good! How’ve you been, man?”

“Ah, you know how it is around here. I’ve been busy keeping shit from burning down, saving spiders from untimely deaths, the usual.”

Quackity laughed, his sighted-eye twinkling. “Yeah? Gotten any better with a bow yet?”

Tommy’s mouth immediately downturned, earning another peal of laughter from the ex-guard.

Quackity had left Pogtopia shortly after Tommy won his court case, going off to help out the SMP recuperate without a ruler. Apparently, he’d started by helping clean up the mess the vines had left behind. The vines were trapped in the Badlands now, held by some sort of chemical potion the different kingdoms had created together. Apparently they’d gone back to the Crimson Castle’s remains after Techno told them they couldn’t stay here, and they’d been trapped there—almost as if bound by magic—ever since. They had yet to figure out a way to get rid of them completely, but for now, the kingdoms’ at least felt secure enough to station guards out there without fear of them getting possessed. After those were taken care of, Quackity wound up helping set up elections, and then he’d wound up *competing* in the elections and *winning*. He and his vice president, Karl, had turned the SMP into a new nation called “El Rapids.” From what Tommy had heard, it was going well.

“That’s okay, Tommy,” Quackity said. “Hey! You know, you should come with me and Karl to Hypixel sometime. They have this huge competition every year with sword fighting and foot races and stuff—you’d be good at it!”

Tommy chuckled. “Where *is* Karl?”

Usually, Quackity’s brown haired VP was right beside him. They’d had an inseparable bond since the Battle of the Bloodvines, when Quackity had apparently fought against him in the field. Karl had been one of the infected army members, but after the battle ended, Quackity helped pull him up and get him inside.

“Huh,” Quackity said, looking back at the crowd. “He was right behind me with George, but... Oh! There he is! Karl! *Karlos!*”

With *George?*

Tommy only had a second to process Quackity’s words before Karl was bounding towards them, tugging George—Dream’s George, the same George Tommy had grown up with in the SMP lands, *that* George—behind him.

Tommy tried to ignore the sudden tenseness in his chest and shoulders.

What was George doing here? He hadn't seen George since the day Dream left with Phil for the Badlands, and the last time Tommy had seen Sarnap was the moment he'd tried to shoot him in front of the guard tower. Both of them had gone MIA right after the battle, and Tommy hadn't seen either of them since.

Until now, at least.

Karl came to a stop right beside Quackity, instantly linking their hands together.

"Hey Tommy!" Karl greeted. "Long time no see!"

Tommy forced a small smile. His attention kept drifting to George, who was looking quite literally anywhere but at him.

He looked... the same, really. His hair was a bit longer, and he'd gotten round glasses at some point that vaguely reminded Tommy of Wilbur's. Besides that, though, he still looked like the same George from Tommy's childhood. It was as nostalgic as it was terrifying.

Why was he here?

Quackity must have noticed his apprehension, because he nudged George's shoulder and shot Tommy a guilty smile. "Sorry, I probably should have mentioned... Uh, George is El Rapid's treasurer now! Ha ha... uh..."

Quackity gave another, more forceful nudge to George's shoulder, and Dream's ex-knight finally met Tommy's eyes.

It was weird. Tommy had never really been afraid of Sarnap or George. Besides the one time Sarnap tried to bow him during the battle, they'd never tried to hurt him, and on some days they'd even been his closest companions—fishing in the river and wandering around the castle, letting him watch their spars and giving him tiny gifts on his birthday.

Seeing George standing in front of him now, Tommy still wasn't really scared of the man. Instead, he was scared of the implications seeing George brought.

Where George was, Dream usually wasn't far behind. Apparently, that mental reflex still hadn't completely left his brain, because realistically he knew Dream was in prison, but seeing George still made his heart start racing, his palms grow sweaty, and his arms tense like he was *here* somewhere.

A soft hand slid into Tommy's from behind. Tubbo.

Tommy took a deep breath. Leave it to Tubbo to know just how to ground him.

"Hi, Tommy," George started.

"Hey George."

For a moment, they just stared at each other.

“I’m really sorry about everything,” George finally blurted out. He looked down at the floor again, scuffing the toe of his boot against the marble. “As soon as Sapnap and I lit the TNT in the desert, I knew I’d made a mistake. I made a lot of mistakes, really. But uh...” George cleared his throat. “Sorry. I’m not good at feelings stuff. This isn’t coming out right.”

Tommy shook his head, hesitantly stepping closer. Tubbo squeezed his hand.

George looked back up, and his expression was what really convinced Tommy that he was speaking truthfully when he said, “I mean it, though. I’m sorry. And you don’t have to forgive me, but I needed to say it because I’ve been thinking about it for four years but I didn’t want to bother you or—”

Tommy let go of Tubbo to shove his hand out at George. It hung suspended in the air between them. A peace offering.

George paused, staring at it curiously.

Prime, it was as if the guy had never shaken a hand before.

Tommy raised his hand a little higher. “I don’t forgive you,” he said when George hesitantly took his hand.

George nodded as if he’d expected that.

“I don’t forgive you *now*. But if Big Q approves of you, and Karl likes you, then... eventually. Maybe eventually.”

George exhaled, and it was as if half of the tension between them extinguished. Tommy withdrew his hand and stepped back.

“You’ll have to really prove yourself, though,” he warned.

George cracked a small smile. “Of course. I can do that.”

Satisfied that they’d taken at least a small step forward, Tommy slid his hand back into Tubbo’s and squeezed. Tubbo squeezed back.

“Listen, what I said about Hypixel still stands. You should come with us,” Quackity said once the moment had passed. “George can prove himself to you in this game called Bed Wars. He’s *really* good at it.”

George laughed and rolled his eyes. “He’s making fun of me ‘cause I’m colorblind and can’t tell the yellow team from the green.”

“Okay, but it was kind of funny last time. Admit it.”

“No! It was embarrassing!”

Karl and Quackity snickered, and George laughed with them despite himself. Tommy smiled.

“Alright well, have you seen Techno? I want to catch up with him, too,” Quackity asked.

Tommy pointed vaguely off in the direction of the stairs and, after they’d all exchanged goodbyes, Quackity, Karl, and George all headed off in that direction.

Tubbo squeezed his hand one last time before letting go. Tommy turned to face him.

“Who was that?” Ranboo asked, eyes darting curiously between Tommy and Tubbo’s faces.

“You don’t even want to know,” Tommy said. “Tubbo, are you sitting next to me during the coronation or is this stupid Ranboob husband of yours taking my seat?”

“Hey, my name’s not—”

“I’m sitting with you. Ranboo can sit on my other side.”

“Great. Where did you even find this guy anyway?”

Tubbo’s eyes lit up. “Oh! I found him in the woods! It was so weird—”

“ *What?* You didn’t find me in the woods! I—”

“Well that explains a lot. Prime. You’re as tall as a fuckin’ tree, Ranboob.”

“ *My name’s not—* ”

Tommy clapped a hand to Tubbo’s shoulder, giving his best friend a solid head nod. “Welp! I should probably find Phil, but I’ll see you later Tubso. *Ranboob* .”

Tubbo rolled his eyes, but called out a goodbye fondly as Tommy slipped back into the crowd to hunt down his family.

His family.

Even after four years, the words never got old.

—»-»-»—

Tommy had to give Phil credit for his decorating skills. The throne room looked—for lack of a satisfactory word—completely *poggers* .

The curtains had been taken down and cleaned days ago—something Wilbur and his dust allergy was infinitely grateful for. Now they were back up, and a brighter red than Tommy had ever seen them before. The windows and floors had been washed til they shone. The

carpet had been swept and scrubbed. Wooden chairs had been set out in neat rows for the guests. Even the flowers had been changed.

Tommy had helped with the flowers. He and Wilbur went out to the gardens early one morning in search of the perfect coronation flowers. Phil had said they could pick as many as they wanted, just as long as they all fit together in a nice bouquet.

The first flower they'd chosen was Wilbur's idea.

"Purple tulips," he'd said, gesturing to a small plot of the tall purple flowers. *"They symbolize royalty."*

The next flower was less practical, but once Tommy pointed it out they both knew they couldn't leave without it. It was lotus flowers from the pond. The same pond he and Wilbur had thrown rocks into four years ago.

After that, Wilbur started thinking more sentimentally. His final flower of choice, taken from the spot he and Techno had laid when Techno first told Wil about his life in the Nether, was lavender.

Together, the two had carted as many flowers as they could back to the castle. Then Phil had invited Niki over, and the four of them spent the rest of the day arranging the flowers into the vases that now lined the throne room and the halls outside.

Tommy's eyes swept across the rows of chairs behind him. His seat was in the front row, close to the minister's stand, but since the ceremony hadn't started yet he was free to flip around and survey the crowd.

His eye caught easily on Niki a few rows back. She sat with another boy, laughing and chatting animatedly about something Tommy couldn't make out.

On the other side of the room, Karl, Quackity, and George were all sitting together in one of the middle rows. Close to them were Bad and Ant, two rulers from the Badlands, and Skeppy and Sam sat just next to them.

Tommy's gaze slid across the rows slowly, taking in all the familiar and foreign faces.

"Tommy."

Tommy turned back to the front as Technoblade sat down next to him.

"Are they ready yet?" Tommy asked.

"They're about to start," Techno replied. "Why? Is your child-sized attention span waning?"

"I'll have you know I'm eighteen now, bitch. Legally an adult."

Techno's chair creaked as he leaned back against it. "Maybe I should get Wilbur to change the age to twenty. You tried to get Phil to change it to fourteen, after all."

“Yeah, *tried* . It didn’t work.”

Techno opened his mouth to teasingly retort, but just then, two horns blew from the throne room doors. A hush fell over the crowd, and everyone turned to look as the doors slowly began to open.

While the throne room looked stunning, it was nothing compared to Wilbur’s robes. They were long, like Phil’s, and pale yellow colored with shining gold swirls and flowers designed into the fabric. Wearing them, Wil almost seemed to glow in the brightly lit room, and every eye was immediately drawn to him.

Wilbur held his head high as he glided down the aisle with Phil and six guards at his side. They stopped their procession at the thrones, and Wilbur turned to face the audience while Phil faced him.

Tommy caught his eye, and Wil winked.

Then the ceremony began.

It was almost an hour of long recitations and formal rites, but to Tommy it passed by in the blink of an eye.

“King Philza, please remove your crown,” the minister instructed, and Phil stepped up to Wilbur once again.

Phil reached up and carefully lifted his crown from his head. Tommy had only seen that crown a few times since he’d lived here. It was only used for very important royal ceremonies, so usually it was locked up in one of the castle’s turrets. Wilbur had shown it to him when he’d first been adopted, and then again a few weeks ago as they’d been preparing for the coronation.

“*You know,*” Wilbur had teased him and Techno, “*one day one of you could find yourself wearing this.*”

“*Ehhhh... I think we’ll leave the kingdom rulin’ to you,*” Techno had responded. He’d leaned over and rested his elbow against Tommy’s shoulder—a hard feat to conquer now that they were nearly the same height. “*We weren’t born into this; we just live here.*”

Tommy had snorted, and the three of them dissolved into giggles.

Now, Tommy watched with wide eyes as Wilbur dipped into a bow in front of the crown.

“With the transition of the crown,” the minister spoke from his stand, “the kingdom passes into a new reign.”

Wilbur’s robes melted around him as he sank low enough for Phil to place the crown on his head. Tommy watched, transfixed, as the crown was nestled into Wilbur’s bushy, dark hair. It sparkled as the sunlight hit it just right, and then Wilbur rose, a smile on his face. He was practically glowing.

Tommy couldn't help the smile that stretched across his face as he watched Phil step back, retreating to the smaller throne on Wilbur's right. Wilbur stepped forward, and the entire room seemed to hold its breath.

"On this day, the twenty-second of May, Pogtopia enters a new era with their new ruler: King Wilbur Watson."

On that day, the twenty-second of May, surrounded by his family and friends in the kingdom Tommy had learned to call home, Tommy took Techno's hand and watched his other brother accept the crown.

The throne room burst into cheers.

Chapter End Notes

omg yikes it's finished. Hahaha *starts screaming* 😂

THANK YOU GUYS SO SO SO MUCH FOR READING!!! I wrote this story in like a month - the end of May to the very beginning of July - and it was a whirlwind. There's a whole back section of one of my writing notebooks dedicated to it.

Besides that, though, the bloodvines? What happened to them? The chemicals used to keep the bloodvines cooped up are supposed to be a reference to potions (this would be these kingdoms' first experience making potions, and they'd develop later into the ones we see in vanilla Minecraft). Also, the Crimson is kinda sorta maybe the Blood God? I thought about it, I really did, and it's hinted at when Techno says that the Crimson wanted to be referred to as "a god." The only reason I never explicitly explained that was because I didn't want to have to infodump about Techno's voices and how those worked in regards to the Crimson actually being the Blood God. My idea was that Techno came into contact with the vines, once, in the Nether, but they were baby vines then (lmao) and couldn't really do much except make his own voices slightly violent? They were completely passive before then. Then he grows up with a mixture of the Crimson's voices and his own, and that's why certain voices freak out about the Crimson so much when he confronts it, and also why he can sort of keep his head even when it possesses him. He's had experience with it.

I want to write some backstory, single-chapter fic stuff eventually, so maybe I'll write this stuff into one of those. For now...

Like I said already, thank you guys so so so incredibly much for reading. :) I put this note into every chapter, but only because it's seriously true: I appreciate it so much! This fic has been like my baby and I'm really glad you guys seemed to enjoy reading it as much as I had fun writing it.

STAY POG!

- Kat

//

comments and kudos are always appreciated! and, like, fanart...? holy shizzle sticks I'd cry. also, feel free to pop by and say hello on tumblr [@youreyeslookliketheocean](https://www.tumblr.com/youreyeslookliketheocean)!! <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!